

BOY SCOUTS OF THE AIR ON THE FRENCH FRONT



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Boy Scouts of the Air Books

The Boy Scouts of the Air
on the French Front

The
Boy Scouts of the Air
on the French Front

BY
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The Boy Scouts of the Air on the French Front

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I THE BIG NEWS.....	9
II THE BLACK BAG.....	22
III A DOUBLE DISAPPEARANCE.....	37
IV THE UNEXPLAINABLE.....	52
V THE <i>SELIM</i> SINKS A SUBMARINE.....	67
VI ACROSS THE WATER.....	82
VII AT THE AMERICAN CAMP.....	98
VIII OSKEY-WOW-WOW!	114
IX A PAIR OF SOCKS.....	133
X ACROSS NO MAN'S LAND.....	149
XI A DOUBLE FALL.....	164
XII THE "VAMPIRE" DOES IT.....	180
XIII BIG NEWS.....	201
XIV AN EXPLODED RESCUE.....	219
XV THE SKY FISH.....	236
XVI HOW IT ALL HAPPENED.....	252

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

“ Drop! ” shouted Captain Ring. “ Down on your face, Jerry, and dig in.” *Frontispiece*

On the floor, gagged and trussed up like a fowl, lay the detective. . . . His face was the color of death. *Page 34*

Out of the sky, directly in front of them, but from an unbelievable height, a monster biplane coursed directly toward them. *Page 173*

“ Tod! Jerry! ” came a cry in a familiar voice as the pilot tottered out of his seat and staggered toward them. *Page 251*

The Boy Scouts of the Air on the French Front

CHAPTER I

THE BIG NEWS

“Jerusha, Jerry, but I’ve sure got something to surprise you!”

“You’re all surprises, Tod. Some day you’ll surprise me by forgetting to locomotive your sentences with ‘Jerusha.’ I’ve heard ‘Jerusha, Jerry,’ so often that half the time I think it’s part of my name. Jerusha, Jerry!”

“I don’t know but that it’s an improvement over Jerry Ring. At least it’s got a different ‘ring’ to it.”

“After that, nothing will surprise me. What was the great secret you were bursting to tell me when you scissored over our front fence instead of walking through the open gate? If ever you become famous and I write your autobiography —”

"People write their own autobiographies," reminded Tod.

"Not you. You couldn't even spell the name of your book. When I write it I'm going to lay great stress on the fact that you can't see a gate—"

"Yours, written by me, will tell how you couldn't see a fence, or a wall. I don't know that I ought to tell you my secret after all. Catch any fish yesterday, you and Dave Thomas?"

"A dozen or so. What you baiting for now? Suckers?"

"I heard from dad."

"From Washington? Nothing very surprising in that!" exclaimed Jerry. "Is he still hobnobbing with the big moguls? I could sell them a dozen airships in the time he takes to resell one. I thought the whole deal was settled before he went there."

"It was. But now they're dickering to get him to build a couple for them,—big fellows. They want them right off to take over to the French front and help Pershing go 'over the top.' Believe little Toddie, when the Ful-

ton airship starts sputtering you're going to hear something drop."

"One guess what will drop. The first time I saw your dad's contraption it was leaving a trail of smoke to where it buried its nose in the dust. As soon as I heard they were going to use your dad's invention in the American air service I volunteered for the infantry."

"When you volunteer—say, by that time I'll be exempt on account of old age. Your folks won't let you—and you know it."

"Now *you've* got one guess coming—"

"You don't mean they've given in—you don't mean it!"

"Maybe I don't—but how about that tremendous secret? I guess I've got an even trade for you. I thought you had heard *my* big news when you came skyrocketing over the fence."

"Dad's going to New York as soon as he finishes the plans for two big Fulton Aeroplanes he's to build for the U. S.!"

"Huh! Nothing skyrockety about that."

"*That* isn't it. He figures that you and I deserve a more fitting reward even than that

fishing trip he took the bunch on, for our part in saving the airship from those two German agents. That was enough for the rest of the crew, but for us 'two heroes,' as he says, he figures that he ought to give us a chance to see little old New York, and so he sends us a check to cover 'coming' expenses and he'll make our heads swim with a week's whirlwind view of New York. After that he's got to go to the plant up-state to superintend the building of two of the 'this-way-to-Berlin' high-signs. So chase on into the house and put on your best bib and tucker, 'cause we're off on the next train."

"That is some news! So is mine, and I'm afraid it'll knock yours in the head. You know how I've teased dad to let me get in on the big scrap. Well, finally he and ma have given in. Ma's cried ever since, but I've just got to go—and I'm going down to see Major Plympton this afternoon. So you see that puts a crimp—"

"Jerusha, Jerry, there'll be plenty of fighting after we've seen New York. Come on along with me, and maybe the two of us can

talk dad into letting me go along. Uncle Sam needs another husky fighter."

Jerry Ring looked at his lanky companion, a slow grin spreading over his good-natured face. They were an oddly assorted pair, so far as looks were concerned. For whereas Jerry was rather stocky and fair and inclined to be red-faced, Tod Fulton was tall and loosely jointed and dark. But if Jerry was good-natured, Tod was easy going; and both could give and take with the best of spirit. Jerry was impulsive to the point of recklessness, but Tod's cool-headed nerve kept him close at the other's heels. Needless to say, they were inseparable.

Tod's father, Mr. Fulton, was an inventor. Well-to-do, he had spent most of his talent in thinking up ingenious but useless trifles. However, his latest invention was neither useless nor a trifle. The Fulton Aeroplane was the only heavier-than-air machine capable of stopping dead-still in mid-flight. In time of peace there was no practical utility in this feature, but war times gave it untold value. Capable of flying high above the reach of any anti-aircraft gun, it could hover over any particular

spot in the line and drop bombs with deadly accuracy.

Mr. Fulton had first tried to interest the United States government in the airship, but we were at peace then, and the officials were slow to see the necessity of holding the invention for our own use. But the Great War had broken out, and Mr. Fulton, pro-English at heart, had offered it to agents of Great Britain. He gave them an option on the sole right to manufacture and use the machine, but they held off until he could show a full-sized, perfect-working machine. He became impatient with their over-cautiousness, and finally was tempted into selling a second option to a man who represented himself as the agent of a private concern. It was not until after many adventures, in which both Jerry and Tod had figured prominently, that this man was revealed as an agent of Germany. With the first option expired and the second one revoked, Mr. Fulton was free to accept the offer of this country to reconsider his proposition. Our entrance into the World War made the Fulton Aeroplane of inestimable value to the boys in khaki.

All of this is told in another story, "THE BOY SCOUTS OF THE AIR ON LOST ISLAND."

Way down in his heart, Jerry was more pleased at Tod's news than he would admit, for his father's consent to his enlistment had been dependent on Tod's going along, and was given, it must be confessed, after Mr. Fulton had declared himself unalterably opposed to his son's going to the front. Boys of seventeen, both parents reasoned, were a bit young to expose to the rigors of the man-sized war going on over in cannon-swept Europe.

So, Tod reasoned, the trip to New York might be the very thing needed to swing both fathers into line.

His mother readily gave her consent when Jerry broke the big news to her a few minutes later. Tod had no mother to consult. So he spent his time getting his traps together, and by four o'clock that same afternoon was back at the Ring home to help Jerry with his final arrangements. Mr. Ring would not be home till six, and the train they planned to take left at a few minutes after seven, but with his mother's consent gained, Jerry had no fear but

that a few minutes' coaxing would gain the desired permission.

Mr. Ring's hearty, "Sure thing, boys!" left nothing to be desired. In high good spirits the two youngsters gave a final tug to suitcase straps, said their good-byes and started off down the street in boisterous haste.

"Just like a couple of kids!" chuckled Mr. Ring to himself.

"Almost grown up," sighed Mrs. Ring aloud. "How time flies."

Time certainly flew with two energetic seventeen-going-on-eighteen boys, once they were on the Flyer. It seemed no time at all before ten o'clock came around and they had piled into their pocket-size Pullman berths; and it was surely less than no time before their porter came through and called them for breakfast. They ate a leisurely meal, but none too hearty. It happened to be "meatless day," and the dining car menu did not strike either boy as very tempting.

"Let's wait a little while before we eat," suggested Jerry. "Maybe we'll come to the line where the time changes — it's between home

and New York, I know — and we'll get back to yesterday."

"Jerusha, Jerry, but you're a simp. There's only a difference of an hour, and it's a gain. If it was around midnight, now, we might accidentally bump straight into to-morrow morning."

"All right, professor, let's be satisfied with fried mush and oatmeal and hominy. We can eat again when we get to New York."

"We'll be there in less than three hours — it's nearly eight now."

But the train was late, over half an hour, and when they disembarked at the sumptuous Pennsylvania station, it was to find no Mr. Fulton awaiting them.

"What shall we do?" queried Jerry, after a careful survey of the immense waiting room showed no waiting familiar face. "Put an ad in the 'help wanted' column?"

"No, dad says there's always somebody in the big city stations that knows everything. Look around for a window marked 'Information.' If dad was delayed or had to go away because the train was late, he'd leave word

or get word here. Ah, there it is — this way, Jerry — no, bring your luggage. It isn't safe to drop anything anywhere in New York."

"Think I'm a green country rube? I was just going to change hands."

"Information" lived up to his reputation that day. At Tod's first question, he reached behind him in a pigeon hole and pulled out an envelope addressed "Tod."

"I guess that'll tell you about what you want to know, young man. I suppose this other boy is Jerry Ring, eh?"

The two boys thanked him and moved away to a seat, where Tod tore open the envelope, remarking as he did so: "I trust you noticed our esteemed friend's form of salutation. Young man, to me! to you — boy."

"Yah — I noticed he said *other* boy, though. Open your letter. Your long legs don't hold up any more years than mine do. What does he say?"

"Your train was chalked up as forty minutes late, and I had an important date which I could just barely make if the train had been on time. I am stopping at the Biltmore, have

reserved a room there for you. Take a taxi there, and tell the clerk who you are; he will do the rest. I may be delayed, but ought to show up by twelve o'clock.' ”

“ The Biltmore — gee, that’s where the millionaires hang out! ”

“ Why, sure. If the war lasts long enough and they need many of dad’s machines, he’ll be a millionaire a couple of times over. That’s why he’s giving us this trip — for saving him a million or two. And taxis — back home we thought we were princes if we got a chance to hook a ride in Jim Long’s hack. ”

The taxi ride did not prove to be a very long one, in point of time at least, though Jerry’s eyes opened pretty wide when he saw the size of the bill that Tod handed over as they hopped out at the Biltmore. It did not prove to be quite so grand as he had fancied the hotel of millionaires ought to be, but the room that the bell boy took them to lacked nothing in the way of comfort or modern conveniences.

The luxury of a hot bath occupied the two for an hour or so, and at the end of that time Mr. Fulton came bustling in the door with an

energy quite unlike the old-time take-it-easy manner of sleepy Rivertown days.

"Hello, son. Howdy, Jerry. How does pokey old New York look to you brisk Westerners? Oh, anything beyond the Ohio River is West to the Borough of Manhattan. Ready for a week of sight-seeing, are you? Better be, because right after lunch we start the ball rolling and it won't be my fault if she doesn't spin at a merry clip. First off, we'll —"

But he did not complete his sentence, for just then there came a ring at the telephone, and he walked across and took down the receiver.

"Yes, this is Mr. Fulton — I said *Mister* Fulton. Who is it? . . . Well, what's his name? — he's got one, hasn't he? . . . Well, let him give it. Oh, that fellow. I'm not seeing him. No, I won't make an appointment. Make it strong — I don't want to see him."

A frown stayed on Mr. Fulton's face all during the really delightful lunch they ate in the hotel dining room. Though he talked cheerfully enough to the boys, an anxious look kept clouding over his eyes and often his answers

came quite at random, till finally the boys ceased their chatter entirely.

“What’s the matter, boys?” he asked after a long silence.

“What’s the matter with you, dad? What’s the worry?”

“The worry?” Mr. Fulton laughed, but the peal did not ring true. “It’s two worries — two live-wire lads who’ll just about run the grand-fatherish legs off me in the next seven days.”

“If we’re going to be *that* much bother —” began Tod and Jerry together, when Mr. Fulton interrupted.

“Forget it — that’s what I’m going to do.” And he did brighten up, so much so that even the waiter shook his fat sides as he brought finger bowls and Mr. Fulton’s change.

“Yassah, Mr. Fulton, dat’s de bes’ joke I done heard sence I’s a lad. An’, Mr. Fulton, sah, dey’s a gen’man dat’s a-wantin’ to see you powerful bad, sah, an’ he’s be’n awaitin’ eva’ sence you-all set down, sah, an’ ef you-all don’ want see him, sah, you jes’ go out de street door by de cashier’s desk — Tank’ee, sah.”

“Confound that fellow!” said Mr. Fulton.

CHAPTER II

THE BLACK BAG

Mr. Fulton headed the boys straight for the Aquarium down at the Battery. Both Tod and Jerry were fishing cranks, and Mr. Fulton promised them that they'd see enough fish one day at least. Big ones, little ones, long ones, short ones, fat ones, slender ones, round ones, some that were all eyes and others all fins, some that lolled in the water or on the sandy bottoms and others that darted past their glass fronts—it was surely an angler's paradise. Only closing time enabled Mr. Fulton to drag the two boys away.

“Back to the hotel, now, and then we'll go out for a bite and pick up some theatre tickets. Here's our car.”

The street car took them within two blocks of the Biltmore.

“All right, boys, you go on straight down the street. I'm going halfway down this block to a little cigar store I ran across where they

keep my own special brand of smoke. I'll join you in ten or five minutes."

The boys went on down the street. When they were halfway down the block Jerry happened to look behind him.

"Wait a minute, Tod," he suggested. "Here comes your dad now."

But they soon saw that it was not Mr. Fulton. He gave the boys a keen scrutiny as he passed, and the boys returned the stare. He was a clean-cut, youngish man, but his face was deep-lined about the eyes and mouth—the face of a man to respect, as an enemy or friend. A close-cropped mustache barely hid his upper lip. He had been walking rapidly as he came up to them; now Jerry noticed that he merely loitered along. Something in Mr. Fulton's attitude all along had aroused Jerry's bump of caution and suspicion; in some vague way the man who had passed them gave him the same feeling.

As they came up to the hotel entrance, having sauntered along slowly, they were not greatly surprised to find Mr. Fulton awaiting them. Nor was Jerry greatly surprised when the

stranger, who had entered the hotel before them, came out again and after staring an instant at the three, came directly up to Mr. Fulton and said with a crispness that had the ring of hard-frosted snow:

“ Mr. Fulton? I am sure it is. I have tried vainly to see you these three days, at Washington and here. I must have a word with you in private.”

“ It is useless. I know what you want, and it is useless. Everything is settled.”

“ But surely you will not deny me an audience. Perhaps I have a counter proposition to make. Perhaps it is not exactly what Mr. Fulton thinks it is that I want.”

“ There is only one thing I have that anyone could want — and I haven't that any longer. It is now the sole and complete property of my government.”

“ Good! Mr. Fulton is a patriot. Yet, knowing that, I would esteem it a great favor if you would grant me but a few minutes of your time, and I assure you it would not be wasted courtesy on your part.”

“ Not to-night. I am taking these two young

rapscallions, my boy here, Tod, and his chum, Jerry Ring, to the theatre to-night—if we can get tickets, that is.”

“ Might I—could I be so bold as to offer you tickets. I have three I cannot use—friends who disappointed me at the last moment. Good seats, at the Winter Garden.”

“ Only if you will allow me to pay you for them.”

“ Now, you surely cannot mean that. I am no ticket scalper. If you do not use the tickets, they will merely be wasted. If you feel you must make a return, give me a half hour of your time any hour you set to-morrow.”

“ Well—” hesitated Mr. Fulton, then gave in. “ At six o’clock, then, here at the hotel.”

“ At six—agreed. I will have a boy bring the tickets and leave them for you with the room clerk. *Au revoir.*”

“ *Auf wiedersehen,*” answered Mr. Fulton. Both Tod and Jerry noticed the sharp look that the man gave him, but Mr. Fulton apparently was paying no heed.

“ Acted as if he didn’t like the sound of his native tongue,” hazarded Jerry when they were

alone and going up in the elevator to their room.

“There you go,” cautioned Mr. Fulton; “jumping at conclusions again.”

“I noticed that His Nerviness didn’t introduce himself — ” began Tod.

“One doesn’t go through the ceremony at each meeting,” observed his father dryly. “The gentleman and I are well acquainted.”

They had come to their floor and were walking down the long, soft-carpeted hall. Mr. Fulton pulled out his key, but before opening the door he turned and faced the two boys.

“Now, youngsters, once you did me a big service by butting in — this time it’s a different story. I expect I shouldn’t have had you come on — just at this time. It begins to look as if we might be in for lively times. It’s up to you fellows to keep cool and let me do the rowing and the steering both — and don’t shout out if you think you see rocks; I know the channel and I want to captain my own boat. Get me?”

“Got you,” agreed both boys.

“All right. Let’s go in now and find out

what that telephone bell is ringing its head off for."

Jerry answered the telephone. It was the desk clerk talking.

"Yes," answered Jerry, "Mr. Fulton is here—want to speak to him?"

"No. Just tell him there's a man down here with something he insists on delivering personally to him. Shall I send him up?"

Jerry repeated the message. "Sure, let him come up," agreed Mr. Fulton. "It must be those theatre tickets. The beggar certainly didn't waste any time."

A moment later there came a furtive knock at their door. Tod opened it—and shrank back. A dark, lean-faced, black-mustached man—he looked as if he had stepped straight out of a dime novel—glided in with catlike grace, closing the door with his foot as he passed through.

His glance shifted over the three. "Who are you?" he demanded of Mr. Fulton.

"Fulton is my name."

"Where were you Saturday morning at ten o'clock and what were you told to expect?"

"But Monday of next week was the time agreed upon. I was to have a week's furlough—" protested Mr. Fulton, ignoring the man's question.

"Things have happened. Department has decided there isn't an instant to spare. Orders are for you to report at Ken—"—he broke off abruptly and darted quick glances at the two boys—"at the place by Friday at noon. Everything will be there and ready. Here are your specification sheets and blueprints, with the Department's notations. I will ask you to give me a note acknowledging delivery."

Mr. Fulton sat down and wrote a receipt. The man asked many questions meanwhile.

"Been bothered any?" he demanded finally.

"Ye—es," admitted Mr. Fulton slowly.

"But no bother."

"Who was it?" grunted the man, "Von Halle?"

"Henderson."

"Same man. Saw him in the lobby. Gave the clerk a package. For you?"

"Theatre tickets."

"Huh. Don't take 'em, but get 'em."

“ In plain English — ”

“ Get the tickets, but don't go out. Or no — you three go to the show but give me your key and I and the black bag will stay here till you return.”

For the first time the boys noticed the package the man had handed Mr. Fulton. It was a black Morocco case, like a salesman's sample case, flat, perhaps an inch thick and something like a foot square. It was well strapped together and had a handle that slipped over the carrier's wrist.

“ You think *they* know about — ” Mr. Fulton's nod indicated the bag.

“ Stumbled slap onto your friend ‘ Henderson ’ down in the lobby. He has several good reasons for remembering me — and he saw the bag and knows you are here. How soon are you going out? ”

“ Right away — we *were*. Dinner first, and then we intended to go right to the theatre.”

“ I see no reason for changing the plan. I'll go back down now and see if our friend is still below. I'll leave the bag here, but you bring it with you as you go out. Carry it under your

arm, in plain sight. A stranger will jostle you before you reach the corner, and ask you for a quarter to get a cup of coffee — be sure it's a quarter he asks for. Give him the bag and take what he gives you. After that, keep in the light. I'm off."

He slipped out the room, leaving the three considerably excited, if the truth be told. After a little they were calm enough to talk it over.

"Queer duck," said Mr. Fulton. "Inclined to make a mountain out of a molehill. Takes himself pretty seriously, I fancy."

"Regular Diamond Dick-Old Sleuth-Nick Carter sort of detective," remarked Tod. "I'll bet he goes out and buys himself a disguise — acts like a correspondence school detective."

"I'll bet he's a pretty clever chap," disagreed Jerry. "Some people have to act the fool to keep others from guessing how keen they really are. There was a twinkle in his eye all the time, as if he was enjoying putting one over on us — and at that I fancy he was hiding half the danger. But I'm getting hungry. How much time do you think we ought to give our mysterious friend?"

“ At least half an hour I’d say. I’ll have the clerk send us up a batch of evening papers to pass the time.”

When the papers came, blazoned across the top of the first one in big capitals was the line:

GERMAN SPIES ACTIVE EVERYWHERE
SAYS CHIEF

That did not reassure them any, and when the three stepped into the lobby a little later, they looked nervously enough about. But there was little to worry, unless the sight of a blue-coated messenger boy could be called alarming. He was just stepping away from the desk. “ There they are now,” they heard the clerk telling him; “ you just missed a tip by about five seconds.”

It was the boy with the theatre tickets, but Mr. Fulton saw to it that he did not miss his tip. Evidently the detective had seen a different transaction between “ Henderson ” and our hotel clerk. They rather expected that either Henderson or one of his spies would be in the lobby, but the roomy chairs were apparently occupied by prosperous business men

who gave the passing party the barest glance. All the way down the block to the car line they were on the alert, but no one accosted them. So they doubled back at the corner. A sleepy looking beggar roused himself from a beer-stupor on a doorstep and shambled toward them, but he was so evidently not their friend that they barely listened to his muttered plea that they give him two cents to make his sole capital of three into a jitney so that he could get himself a cup of coffee, even though he showed the lonely three pennies as evidence.

"That's an old dodge," Mr. Fulton laughed, "even back in the country where we came from. Try something newer."

"All right," whined the beggar. "Give me a quarter, then — for coffee." The whine went out of his voice. "And here's something to keep under your arm."

Unhesitatingly Mr. Fulton slipped the black bag he had carried, into the outstretched hand, taking a similar parcel from the man and tucking it under his arm. The beggar stepped back into the shadow and seemed to melt from sight. The three turned and went on down the street to the car.

“Jerusha!” gasped Tod. “For a second I thought you were going to give that fellow your black bag, thinking he was our detective.”

“He was. I did,” corrected his father.

“Then how’s it come you’ve still got it?” Under Mr. Fulton’s arm was the exact match of the black bag he had carried from the hotel.

The three only stared, and then clambered aboard the passing car. The show at the Winter Garden was good, and the boys enjoyed it in the brief intervals they could tear their thoughts away from wild speculations concerning the evening’s events, past and to come. It was with almost a sigh of relief that they saw the curtain go down for the last time.

“Jerusha!” exclaimed Tod as they mingled in with the outgoing crowd. “Now for it.”

But nothing happened. They reached their street and disembarked without incident.

They rather expected someone would be lying in wait for them, as the street was so deserted at this hour, but they reached the hotel in safety.

As the detective had the key to their room, they did not stop at the desk, but Harris, the

night man, called to them just as they were about to step into the elevator.

“Mr. Fulton—here’s your key. Your friend left it with me for you.”

Considerably perplexed, Mr. Fulton took the key. In silence the three stepped out of the elevator at their floor and walked down the hall. They stood listening a moment before Mr. Fulton put the key in the door. All was still. He unlocked the door and noiselessly turned the knob. He pushed the door open and for a breathless moment they waited there in the lighted hall, hardly knowing what to expect. Then they entered. The moment Tod had switched on the light, Jerry gave a cry of dismay and darted across the room.

On the floor, gagged and trussed up like a fowl, lay the detective. A dull red stain showed on the carpet beside his head; his face was the color of death. Jerry’s quick fingers found the man’s pulse; it beat, but slowly.

It was the work of a hard half hour to bring him to, and then for a long period he could only stare vacantly and mumble meaningless sentences.



On the floor, gagged and trussed up like a fowl, lay the detective. . . . His face was the color of death.

At last —

“The black bag — did they get it?”

“Yes,” answered Mr. Fulton, strangely calm, Jerry thought.

“Ruined!” cried the man, staggering weakly to his feet. “My career is ruined!”

“Strikes me you’re more concerned about your career than you are about my loss,” ventured Mr. Fulton dryly, Jerry thought, with unnecessary sarcasm considering the man’s condition. “What happened?”

“I came back straight after you gave me the key and the bag. Walked in at the servants’ entrance. Walked up the stairs. No one saw me enter the room. I bolted the door from the inside, fastened the windows. I even propped a chair against the doorknob. Then I lay down on that couch. I guess I dozed off, maybe about ten — I was awake all last night. I woke up, sensing that there was someone in the room. Then a thousand pound weight hit me on the temple. That was all till you came.”

“Hm,” grunted Mr. Fulton. “Did you search the room when you came in?”

“No—o.”

"You should have. I have examined all the windows, and the lock. Everything is right as can be. Someone was in the room waiting for you, that's all."

"What are we going to do — " began Tod.

"Nothing," answered Mr. Fulton shortly. "Except get this man a room, and then come back and sleep till morning."

The detective was too weak to protest. The room next to them was secured and the house physician called. Thanks to his care, the wounded man was sound asleep within the half hour.

"But the black bag!" exclaimed Jerry, once they were back in the room. "Those German spies — and I know that's what they are — will have the secret of your invention over in Germany in short order and they'll go ahead and win the war before we can get started."

"Not much they won't," chuckled Mr. Fulton. "That black bag is still under my arm. I reckon I can guard my secrets as well as anybody I know — I traded our friend there his own bag back again! All the time he was guarding his own dummy, while I carried the one with the papers safely all about town."

CHAPTER III

A DOUBLE DISAPPEARANCE

Next morning the detective was gone. He left a note, which said:

“Am out on the trail of the black bag. Have a hot clew. Will report to-morrow morning. Essex.”

“At least we know his name now,” commented Jerry. “That clew must be so hot he can’t hold it.”

It was seven o’clock when they went down to breakfast, Mr. Fulton carrying the black bag but having it strapped under his arm and hidden by his coat so that it could not be noticed. They spent a part of the day in Central Park, then came back and saw the big liners at the docks. One was sending up great funnels of smoke. Tod ventured a guess that she was about ready to raise her gangplank.

“That’s the *Cedric*. She leaves to-morrow morning at ten o’clock,” corrected his father.

“A friend of mine is going to sail on her. I know a few other people I wish were booked to sail at the same time.”

The lights were beginning to twinkle on the big boat as they turned away. A heavy wind came puffing across the Hudson chill and damp with a threat of rain. By the time they had eaten in a near-by restaurant, a drizzle was falling. A miniature flood cascaded down the windows of the street car they boarded, and it was with the certainty of a thorough drenching that they waited for their street to be called. A fat woman came dripping in, dragging an overgrown boy by his grimy hand. She plumped down heavily beside Mr. Fulton, and was soon engaged in a wordy altercation with the conductor, who insisted on demanding carfare for the youngster. Her last argument was a clincher.

“I guess if you’d had to wipe his nose as many times as I have, you’d know better than any pig-headed conductor how old he is. Tell the man how old you are, dearie.”

“Is he company,” asked the cherub, “or shall I tell him five?”

In virtuous indignation she then paid the necessary three cents, almost squashing Mr. Fulton in the stress of her outraged feelings. The boys were glad to get off at their corner so they could find relief in laughter.

The light in the middle of the block had burned out, and the deserted street looked dismal in the rainswept darkness. Jerry shivered — a nervous thrill — for the night was far from cold. “Let’s run for it,” he suggested, himself setting the example.

Only when he reached the dead light did he pause, and then it was to hear Tod gasp, “Jerusha, Jerry, keep out from under a fellow’s feet, will you?”

So Jerry ran the faster. Thus it was that, near the end of the block, running with head down to keep the rain out of his face, he collided, with a force that sent him spinning, with another running figure. Jerry felt something go flying past his head, but he dodged just in time, though the move cost him his footing.

As he sprang hastily to his feet it was to see the partner of his accident likewise pick himself up and go careering down the street,

disappearing into a dark opening perhaps a hundred feet away. Jerry turned just in time to miss another running figure, breathing hard and holding his arm up against his face, evidently to shield himself against the rain. For the merest instant he halted his headlong chase, peered at the two boys and then tore madly off in the direction the other had taken.

“That looked just like—” both boys began together, when there came a sharp interruption. The runner had come up to Mr. Fulton. There was a low cry, the sound of a dull blow, and then, to the horror of the two watchers, the farther away of the two sank backward to the sidewalk. As Tod and Jerry sped toward the prostrate form, they heard the noise of ripping cloth; then a fleeing figure splashed away into the darkness of a yawning entrance-way.

It was impossible to see more than that it was indeed Mr. Fulton who had been knocked down. Even as they came up to him he groaned and tried to raise himself on his elbow. With the two boys helping him, he rose painfully to his feet, and leaning heavily on their shoulders, he slowly made his way to the hotel.

“ No — use — to — to follow,” he grunted and groaned. “ They — got — the — black bag.”

Not another word was said until they were in the safety of their room, although the curious glances of the loungers in the lobby, and the sympathetic inquiries of the elevator man invited confidence.

“ They say pride goes before a fall,” he remarked. “ I don’t know that Detective Essex could have done anything worse than that himself. Him and his hot clew!”

“ You know,” was Jerry’s comment, “ we thought for a second that that second fellow was Essex.”

“ Second fellow? Where was the first?”

“ He passed us, but must have ducked in before he came to you. The second man was chasing him.”

“ By George! Then that *was* Essex. He was following his hot clew. And he mistook me for the man he was following. He’s got my black bag!”

“ Yes — and by George! I’ve got a hot clew too!” shouted Jerry, “ and I’m going to follow it.” Before the others could remonstrate he

was out of the door and racing down the hall. He did not wait for the elevator, but bounded down the stairs four flights to the lobby. He forced himself to a walk as he passed through the groups of smoking men, but once out on the street, he broke into a run again.

He had suddenly recalled the object that had sailed past his head. Beyond a doubt it was the other black bag.

A dozen feet or so from where the encounter had taken place he came to an abrupt halt. A dimly visible figure was groping about on hands and knees just inside the walk. The man had come back for his package!

Just at this instant he seemed to sense Jerry's presence. With a muttered ejaculation he sprang to his feet. Jerry did not exactly see him go, but he knew that the man had disappeared. The next instant he too was on his hands and knees, but in a spot some twenty feet away from where the other had been groping. His search was short. At about the fourth blind half-circle his fingers encountered a heavy object with a compact, leathery feel. A thrill of triumph shot up his arm and telegraphed the

joyful news to his brain even as he was leaping to his feet. He could hardly restrain an exultant cry as he sped back hotelward. He impatiently waited for the elevator to shoot him up the four floors, but his thoughts went galloping ahead to the surprised moment when he should spring the news of his find.

But he found another surprise awaiting him as he hurried down the hall. Just turning in at the door of their room was Essex, the detective!

He opened the door himself just in time to hear Essex conclude an excited narrative with:

“So I followed the burly fellow, break-neck. Just in the darkest spot in the middle of the block I came up with him. He turned on me. With an oath he shot out one ponderous fist, straight for my jaw. It would have felled an ox had it landed. But I ducked, grappled with him, and found a hold I learned from a Jap I once had official dealing with. He was a genuine giant for strength, but there was no breaking my hold. With my free hand I grasped at the black bag, which he had concealed under his coat. Madly I struggled—it came loose.

Letting go my hold, with all my force I struck out at him. He went down; I turned and ran."

Mr. Fulton's face was twitching as he listened to this imaginative tale, but he held his voice level as he asked:

"And the black bag? You have it?"

With an air of triumph the detective unbuttoned his coat, then his vest. Reaching under his armpit he drew forth a much-crumpled black case. He tossed it on the table before Mr. Fulton.

Gravely Mr. Fulton picked it up. Then a frown creased his brows. With a few deft tugs he pulled off the straps and flung open the bag. *It was empty!*

After the gasp of consternation that arose from the three who stood speechless about the table, Jerry came forward and joined the group. Silent, too, he tossed his black bag on the table. Mr. Fulton looked up at the boy inquiringly, but Jerry said nothing. Then Mr. Fulton undid the straps and opened bag number two.

Two folded newspapers, to-day's latest edition! That was all.

The silence was profound. It lasted to pain-

ful proportions. Finally Mr. Fulton rose and walked to the door. Slowly he locked it from the inside, then wheeled. From where he stood he demanded levelly:

“Essex — what’s your game?”

Th man only stared. Mr. Fulton went on.

“The big burly ruffian you attacked a few minutes ago was I. I was the man you knocked down. This ” — pointing at the empty black bag — “was the bag you tore out from under my coat. It was the real bag; it held the Department’s papers at the moment you took it. Essex, where are they now?”

“That bag was not opened from the time I got it till I laid it on the table. I have had it in my possession every second of the time. It must have been empty when I took it from you.”

“Impossible!”

“You may doubt my honesty, Mr. Fulton, but I am telling the truth. I know nothing was taken out of that bag. How did you come to have the real one anyway?”

Mr. Fulton explained.

There was no doubting the man’s absolute

sincerity. At Mr. Fulton's story he was simply dumbfounded.

"It must have been rifled while you slept; that's all."

"But it was full when I strapped it around me. It's flabby now—I would have noticed its condition had it been empty. And I haven't had it off since morning."

Essex picked up the leather case and began fingering it absently. "If you had taken the further precaution always to sit between these two youngsters, it couldn't possibly have been picked. As it is—" he pressed at each end of the case, so that the sides bulged out. A gaping slit showed across the full width. "Where did anyone sit next to you?"

"Only on the street car," answered Mr. Fulton, but with a laugh. "A fat woman with a baby. She had a squabble with the conductor concerning its age."

"Fat woman with a baby," repeated Essex thoughtfully. "Did she get off before you did?"

"No."

"Sounds as if she didn't have time to finish

her job—if *she* cut your case. Did you come straight from the car?”

“ Yes — we ran.”

“ Then there’s one chance — a slim one — that the papers fell out on the way. We’d best go back and look.”

In another moment they were out on the street, Jerry well in the lead. He ran low, making hardly a sound on the wet sidewalk, the slight slash of his footsteps drowned in the steady spatter of the rain. He was soon aware of someone ahead of him,—someone who was stooping over and slowly, closely, examining the walk where he had recovered the black bag. Sure that it was the same man he had twice encountered earlier, Jerry lessened his pace to a bare walk. The others behind him had already begun a careful search and were hardly creeping along a hundred feet in the rear.

Jerry had no particular plan as he cautiously drew near the groping figure. His main thought was merely to prevent the man’s finding the packet of papers. But when he heard the man give a low exclamation of satisfaction, grab up a bulky something from the wet walk and jam

it in his pocket, Jerry's mind was quickly made up.

A football line smash sent him crashing into his opponent, who went down hard, Jerry on top and fighting for a wrestling hold. The fall stunned the under man for an instant, but the minute he regained his wits Jerry realized that he had a fight on his hands. Breathing hard, the two tumbled about, to the sound of ripping clothing. Jerry grunted under a vicious blow in the stomach, but a second later countered with a smash to the other man's jaw.

After that, for a while it looked as if the fight was won. And then, in an instant it was lost again. A black bulk loomed over the struggling two for the briefest moment. Then a ponderous fist descended. A million comets seemed to swarm about Jerry's head; his muscles relaxed and he sank to the ground without a groan.

When he regained consciousness he was back at the hotel in their room, lying stretched out on the couch, a cold, wet bandage on his head and three anxious watchers standing beside him.

"What happened?" he asked weakly.

“ We were just waiting till you came to, to ask you that same question,” answered Mr. Fulton. “ We found you lying unconscious beside the walk, and when we got you here, there was a lump above your ear that looked like the memory of a Missouri mule.”

“ Guess it was an earthquake,” with a wan grin. “ I stumbled into the man who lost the black bag. He had just found your papers. I tackled him and just about had him bested when a mountain with a battering ram caved in my cranium.”

“ He must have hit you on the other side, then,” joked Tod, “ ’cause it’s sure caved out on this side.”

“ I guess that’s good-bye to my specifications,” Mr. Fulton mourned. “ They’re away on the other side of town by now. I’m going down to the lobby and telegraph Washington. They have duplicates, and we can at least go ahead with our own aeroplane building. We have the jump on them, at all events. And it may be that the secret service operatives can catch these sly fellows before they get out of the country.”

He went out. Jerry settled back into a painful doze, and Essex and Tod stared moodily out the windows. Perhaps half an hour passed. Mr. Fulton had not returned and Tod was growing uneasy.

"He can't get lost in the hotel," Essex objected.

"But he might have gone out. He may not have wanted to wire from the hotel office—so many loungers about, and any of them might be a spy. And if he went out—"

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Essex. "All this excitement has gone to your head. He's able to take care of himself."

"Just the same, I'm going out and look for him. I don't feel easy in my bones."

So Tod went out. He too was gone for more than half an hour when Jerry roused up and noticed his absence. "Where's Tod?" he asked Essex.

"Gone out to look for his father."

"Hasn't *he* come back? How long since he went out?"

Essex looked at his watch.

"By Jove! It's almost an hour now! Some-

thing must have happened. I'd better chase out and locate him."

"I'm going along," insisted Jerry, though he staggered as he rose from the couch. Essex tried to push him back from the door, but Jerry would not be denied. However, neither of them went far, for as they opened the door they came upon Tod, white-lipped and trembling.

"Dad's disappeared. He hasn't been seen in the lobby, and no message has been sent, either at the hotel office or the telegraph office down the street. He's simply vanished!"

CHAPTER IV

THE UNEXPLAINABLE

It was a wild night that followed. When morning finally dawned it found three pale-faced searchers. Every clew had been run down, and they all ended in the one thing—nothing. As a last resort Essex wired the Department at Washington, and went to notify the police. Help would be forthcoming, but that brought little comfort. Mr. Fulton might as well have vanished into thin air. No one had seen him from the instant that he left the room. And if he had not gone through the lobby, where had he gone? Tod and Jerry asked themselves that question with increasing anxiety as the hours passed.

Kidnapped! That was the one alarming certainty that stared them in the face.

Why? It was easy enough to guess. The plans, blueprints and specifications for the Fulton Aeroplane had been stolen. The robbers would reason that with these in their posses-

sion, and the inventor out of the way, the United States government would manufacture few airships of that type.

The three met at the room, where Tod, no longer able to keep his eyes open, fell into a dull sleep. Essex went out to get a bite of breakfast, and Jerry, left to his own devices, stalked about the room, kicking at the furniture, moodily speculating. A new thought struck him.

The stolen papers would be of little value in this country. The conspirators were undoubtedly German; they would make all speed back to the *Vaterland*. They would have all plans made and be ready to take the first ship. Jerry had not seen either the man who had run into him or the one he had attacked—if, indeed, they were not one and the same—but he had seen the man who had made the appointment with Mr. Fulton. If Jerry's theory was correct, this man would be the one to carry the papers across the ocean. It was a wild enough theory, perhaps, but in the lack of a better one it was at least worth trying. He decided to go down to the dock and scan the passengers

of whatever ship heaved anchor that day. He remembered now their conversation of the day before at sight of the smoke-belching funnels of the *Cedric*.

He lost his way and with it much precious time. Only a few belated passengers were hurrying on board as he came up — the chances were that the man he sought had been among the first. He was about to turn away again, when a stir among those who lined the passageway caught his eye. The warning signal had been given; all visitors had been ordered ashore and were now passing over the gangplank.

A dapper, slim figure parted the crowd as a swimmer cuts through the water. A single glance told Jerry who it was. It was Henderson — Von Halle — the man Jerry suspected. Jerry darted through the crowd in the wake of the fast disappearing figure. He saw the gangplank begin to rise, then settle back again at the shout of the fugitive. As he passed the rail a bell began to clang with a vigor that said as plainly as words: "This is the last."

Jerry made a desperate effort to reach the

plank in time, his last leaps spurred by the sight, close-clutched under the vanishing man's arm, of a black leather case not unlike the two empty ones back there in the room.

Too late!

The purser in his little wicket shook his head regretfully, then decidedly as he learned that the frantic boy neither had nor wished to buy a ticket. When Jerry refused to state the reason for wishing to overtake the man who had gone on just ahead, the official curtly invited the boy to get ashore as fast as his legs would take him. The warning bell added emphasis to his request.

Jerry bit down his vexation and disappointment; he turned back and crossed the gang plank and made his way through the thinning crowd. At least they could still fall back on the wireless, and now that the government was in it every means would be employed to overtake the fleeing man. Thank goodness, there was no means of escape from a vessel in mid-ocean.

But first he would talk it over with Essex. The detective would know what to do in an

emergency of this sort. In the meanwhile, there was still Mr. Fulton unaccounted for. Jerry bought a paper to read on the car; he needed something to distract his thoughts. No war news — the British had made a big advance just a few days before and were now merely consolidating their gains. The French lines were sustaining a terrific bombardment along a seventy-mile front, but so far there had been no accompanying infantry attack. So quiet was the fighting front that the usual scarehead was devoted to the announcement that a German submarine had been sighted less than ten miles off the coast. Ah, well, they were always sighting German submarines when other news was scarce. This one was undoubtedly merely a commonplace dull-day report — to be denied in the next edition.

Essex was back. He had breakfasted and inspired by the rest and the food had thought up several plausible theories — all of which had proved fruitless. He was now sitting, his head in his hands, trying for the hundredth time to bring reason out of the unreasonable. He looked up as Jerry came in.

“Do you suppose,” he ventured, “that Mr. Fulton could possibly have decided all of a sudden to go on to Washington instead of wiring? He could just barely have caught the Flyer if he didn’t stop to try to get us word.”

“He couldn’t have caught it from the fourth floor of the Biltmore. No one saw him go out.”

“But he must have gone out. No one could have failed to notice him if he had been dragged out by force. Besides, he could have got a message to us long before this if he had merely gone to Washington. No, he’s either held some place—in the hotel or out of it—against his will, or he’s—dead.”

“But in any case he must have been taken out of the hotel.”

“Why?—with five hundred or more rooms in which to hide him or his—his body? Have the police come yet?”

“I didn’t notify them. I wanted to hear from the Department first. They might not want the police in on it. They could get their own operatives here as quickly as we could call a bluecoat. Listen. There’s someone at the door. I expect it’s my answer now.”

Jerry opened the door; a messenger boy entered.

"Mr. Essex?" he inquired.

"Here," and Essex came forward and almost tore the envelope from the boy's hand, while Jerry signed for it. "No answer. Chase along."

Essex read the brief message twice, then handed it to Jerry. It read:

"Moody and Peters ordered to report to you at once. Do not notify police. No message received from Fulton. Duplicates of papers held here, but originals must be regained. Get them."

"They probably wired their men at the same time they sent this. We can expect to hear from them within the hour. I expect you'd better lie down a bit beside your friend there and snatch forty winks. You look as if you needed it."

Jerry protested that he wasn't the least bit sleepy, but in less than forty seconds he had taken the first of his forty winks. He might have slept on through the rest of the forenoon, and afternoon as well, had not the loud talking

wakened him. He opened his eyes to see Tod and three men in earnest discussion. He readily guessed that the two strangers were Moody and Peters.

Peters proved to be the taller of the two, a rather affected sort of chap, dapper-dressed and sporting a three-weeks' mustache. But his eyes were keen and the lips that showed under the elegant mustache were firm enough.

Moody certainly did not look the part. Tod afterwards confided that he figured Moody at some time had been a Jewish insurance solicitor. His hawk nose gave the lie to full, sensitive lips, and his eyes had a brooding look in their brown depths. He talked like the broadside of a machine gun, and his words were just as well directed. He was a man of few words, but everyone listened when he opened up.

For half an hour after Jerry entered the conversation, Moody sat back and said nothing, though it was evident from vigorous nods and shakings of the head that he had definite opinions. When he heard Jerry's story of his trip to the *Cedric*, he came over and slapped Jerry on the shoulder.

“ You’ve got the makings of a detective, boy. You’re right, where we’ve all been wrong. The man who carried the papers went aboard the *Cedric*. There’s a Service man on every outgoing liner these days, and I happen to know the chap who trails the *Ced*. I can still reach him by wireless, and that will be my first job. Here’s another item to chew over. You may have noticed the papers report a German submarine lying close off-coast. Perhaps there’s nothing to it, but that’s the first one reported in months, and after the last one was sighted, Mueller, trailed by the Department for months, slipped out the country without leaving a trace. It’s just possible that sub came here to take off your chap Henderson or Von — whatever-you-call-him.”

“ Then why did he take the liner? ”

“ One reason is that a U. S. destroyer chased the U-boat for about sixty miles — he had to leave in a hurry, and the *Cedric* was ready to go. We’ll know more about it when we hear from my friend Morrison.”

“ But how about Mr. Fulton? ” was Jerry’s anxious query. “ Where does he come in? ”

“He don’t, and there’s the trouble. I can’t figure why they wanted to do away with him — unless he ran into them and they had to croak him in order to make their get-away. I know that sounds pretty rough to you, young man,” he said to Tod, “but the sooner you get used to the idea that the worst may have happened to your daddy, the better off you’ll be. The only thing I can figure out is this: They had a chance to look over those papers. Suppose they couldn’t quite get the hang of them. They might have grabbed up the old man and carted him off some place where they could try to force the dope out of him.”

“You surely don’t think they carried him off in that submarine?” gasped Tod.

“Well, hardly.” Moody smiled. “But there’s many a secluded place right here under Uncle Sam’s nose. Of course, I’m not saying that if they could get him to the submarine that they wouldn’t take him right over to Germany, especially now that the other chap has crossed over with his papers. Let’s wait till we hear from Morrison before we decide about that, hey? In the meanwhile, I’ll be off to the

wireless. Peters, you and Essex better give the hotel a good combing. Search every corner of the servants' quarters. Also be sure you go through every room on this floor. If he's in this hotel he's in one of those two sections. As for you two amateurs, you're on your own hook. See if you can make us old-timers sit up and take notice."

He and the two other detectives quickly left. Tod sat with his head in his hands, while Jerry pursed his lips in a tuneless whistle as he stared out the one window that gave a view of countless house-tops down the street.

"What are *we* going to do?" groaned Tod finally.

"Get something to eat, first off. I'm about starved."

"I couldn't think of eating at this time."

"Gee whiz, Tod, you're not going to throw down the dad like that, are you? You can't use your brain very long unless you feed it. I'm just about as cut up over this as you are, but I'm not going to let my feelings get the better of my judgment. Let's go feed, and then we'll do a little sleuthing on our own hook. It *would*

be great if we could beat out those other chaps! ”

Tod brightened up a bit at *that*, and astonished himself by eating a hearty meal at a near-by restaurant. That over, they started back for the hotel, but on the way Jerry was seized with an inspiration.

“ Do you suppose,” he asked eagerly, “ supposing that your father *did* come down through the lobby without anyone’s seeing him, that he went out intending to send his message from a regular telegraph office. You remember he changed his wet coat when he came in and his cigars were in it. He came out into the fresh air and suddenly got hungry for a smoke. It was just a little bit out of the way for him to go to that tiny tobacco shop he talked about. He may have gone on to there, intending to ask about a telegraph office there — there’s none in the one block we’ve always traveled from the street car. What do you think? ”

“ It sounds worth a try, at least. Can we find the right cigar store? There must be dozens of them.”

“ We’ll try. If we find one that keeps your dad’s brand of smoke, that’s probably the place.

What was it he called them? El Parcial? ”

Tod grunted an affirmative, and they turned off onto the side street where they had seen Mr. Fulton go. Fortunately for them, it was a quiet street, of residences set back from the walk and of little store buildings jutting out. A modern combination billiard hall and cigar store occupied the first corner, but they passed it by without a thought. A delicatessen with a little stock of smokers' goods came next, but that too they left unexplored. After that there was a dearth of tobacconists. A bakery shop, a down-at-the-mouth restaurant boasting home cooking, a saloon and a notion store wound up the block.

There was still the other side of the street, but a casual glance showed no promise. However, they crossed over for a close inspection.

And then they almost missed it.

A dingy half-lighted window, a dozen feet or more back from the walk, a dark-curtained door at the bottom of a short flight of steps, and a rain-and-weather deadened sign with the dim picture of a cigar and the hardly decipherable, “ I make 'em.”

Hardly able to contain their satisfaction, the two boys tumbled down the rickety steps. A bell tinkled somewhere as they pushed open the creaky door. They entered a low-ceiled, musty room, dank with the smell of damp tobacco. A counter ran the length of the room except where a battered display case crouched behind the door.

At a bench, rolling cigars by the light of a smoky kerosene lamp, sat a bewrinkled man, his veined hands the color of the leaves he shaped.

“No,” he said, blinking at the boys. “No, you do not come for tobacco. Young men never come to me. Only old men, who have learned. Sometimes there are those who have been sent. They are not so old, but then they come but the once. No, you come not for tobacco.”

“No,” answered Jerry, humoring the old fellow, “we do not come for tobacco, nor have we been sent. We come to ask about one who had learned. He did not smoke those you make yourself—he had not learned enough. He smoked the *El Parcial*—”

“Ah, it is Messer Fulton you seek. He has not been here. Twice yesterday, but not to-day.”

“ Twice! ” cried Tod excitedly. “ He was here last night about seven o’clock? ”

“ Nearer eight, I think. You are his son? You favor him, I think. ”

“ Yes — yes. He is gone — lost — disappeared. Tell us all you can. ”

“ Little — it is little. He came here with the foreign man — ”

“ A slender man with close-cropped — ”

“ No, the man I speak of is large. He wears no beard. He followed Messer Fulton in; they did not speak together. But he, the large man, handed your father a bit of paper — a check it was, I think. Your father tore it up without to look at it. Then they went out. And that was all. ”

“ You did not hear anything — a cry — a shout for help? ”

“ No. That was all — only that they did not buy any tobacco. ”

CHAPTER V

THE *SELIM* SINKS A SUBMARINE

“What now?” asked Tod, once they were out on the street.

“Hunt up Moody and tell him what we know. This is the place to start the hunt.”

But neither of the three detectives were back at the hotel, nor did they show up till late that evening. Jerry and Tod were at a loss just what to do. Since no word from Mr. Fulton had been received at Washington, it was obvious that it would be no use to inquire at other telegraph offices. They thought of making a round of the taxicab stands, since it was hardly possible that Mr. Fulton had gone away of his own free will or that the “foreign man” and his accomplices had taken him by force except in a closed vehicle.

But they decided against the taxicab; it was too public a conveyance. The conspirators had undoubtedly had their own machine in waiting. And in this big city, of countless automobiles,

the proverbial needle in the haystack was no safer from detection than they. So perforce the boys awaited the return of Moody and his helpers.

At eight o'clock Essex came in, alone. A half hour later Peters hurried in. He had run down what at first looked like a live clew. Two men had brought in a third, who answered to Mr. Fulton's description, to the emergency hospital of a small town thirty miles out. An automobile accident, they had said. But Peters found upon his arrival at the hospital that the injured man was a blond, a Swede who answered to the name of Swanson. So Peters had come back to learn what the others had discovered. He and Essex talked over the case in monotonous repetitions, but the boys held their news for the arrival of the third detective. Moody was the man they had the most respect for.

He came in after ten o'clock, his mouth sagging at the corners in a way that suggested physical fatigue. Discouragement showed in his weary eyes and there was no smile in the nod he gave them as he came in.

"Three of a kind," he observed dryly. "I

can tell by the looks of you two that you haven't uncovered a blessed thing."

"I'm mighty glad you didn't say *five* of a kind," chuckled Jerry, "because *we* have." And he told of their discovery at the little tobacco shop.

"Why didn't you tell us this before?" demanded Essex. "We've lost over two hours—and we might have had a chance to follow up your discovery if you had told us in time."

Jerry was glad to be spared a reply. Moody broke in: "Nothing much to be gained there, it strikes me, except a description of the 'foreign man.' Any message come—who asked at the desk?"

"I didn't," answered both Peters and Essex.

"I didn't stop. I thought you fellows would get in ahead of me, and would have any word that might have come. I'd better go down and see."

Essex was too disgruntled at the boys to discuss this new development, so a moody silence sat on them all until the other detective's return. He came in excitedly, waving a yellow sheet of paper.

“ From Morrison, aboard the *Cedric*. Listen: ‘ No one answering description now on board. Man overboard here just at dark. Purser’s description fits yours. Infernal machine found in hold same time. No baggage. Morrison.’ ”

“ Gee whiz! ” cried Tod. “ Overboard, in midocean, you might as well say. Some nerve that man had—to go out to do a job that meant certain death.”

Jerry said nothing; his thoughts were busy. In a queer way that thoughts sometimes have, two facts had come up to the surface at the same time—two unrelated incidents, yet, by a wild jump of the imagination, incidents that seemed to link together.

After the others had worn the subject dry, he began slowly: “ Suppose two men had been put at this job, and the one had nabbed the bag, and the other, Mr. Fulton. Suppose again that the one of them was only meant to be a helper—he had another job—to blow up the *Cedric*. A U-boat is sent over to pick up the man who is to get the inventor and his bag of plans. The U-boat gets scared away, but is expected back almost any moment. The wrong man gets

the bag but hasn't time to get it to his friend, who is waiting at some out-of-the-way port with Mr. Fulton. So he sends a message for man number two to take his captive aboard the submarine, and then have the U-boat lie submerged in the course of the *Cedric*, which he boards. At dusk he sights the signal of light, sets off his infernal machine, and jumps overboard, to be picked up before long by boats from the submarine."

"Sounds like a plot for a magazine story," sneered Essex ill-naturedly.

"It is a bit wild," agreed Moody, but mildly.

"Oh, I know it's wild enough, but the funny thing is, it jibes with every fact we know. I saw the man we call Henderson snatch up Mr. Fulton's bundle of papers, and I saw him board the *Cedric*. The tobacco man saw Mr. Fulton with the 'foreign man,' who must have been Henderson's accomplice. The newspapers reported a submarine—and no sane man would jump overboard in midocean. That Henderson was sane. Give me a theory that fits the case any better and I'll admit mine won't hold water—but not before."

Jerry had his back up. For one reason and another he had not liked Essex from the start, and the man's uncalled-for sarcasm had killed whatever liking might have remained. Moreover, he was naturally a bit stubborn, as Tod well knew.

"At any rate, Peters, you and I had better slip out and see if the old man has closed up shop. He might have a little more to tell us."

They went out. They found the shop still open — the proprietor lived at the back. But he could add little to what he had told the boys. He gave a more detailed description of the man who had accompanied Mr. Fulton, and admitted that he had heard the hum of an automobile while the two remained in the shop, and had heard one pass shortly after they left. That was all.

"Well, son," commented Moody, turning to Jerry, "if your theory is correct, they took Mr. Fulton out of town in a machine. We'll throw a circle around New York forty miles out, and we'll soon find out if any big machine passed through there last night. We might accidentally be able to verify that fairy tale of

yours that far at least. Now we'll all hit the hay. Essex, you'd better stay here with the lads. I'll telephone directions to you in the morning. I've got a little scheme I want to sleep over. Peters, you can report to me at the usual place."

Next day was a tiresome one for the boys. Essex disappeared shortly after they awoke, and he did not return all day. Jerry and Tod took long walks to help pass the time, but the hours dragged. They did their best to throw off the gloomy thoughts, but they would press back.

At last, in desperation, they visited a nearby moving picture theatre. It was showing pictures taken on the fighting front, and the exciting scenes were enough to drive away the uncertainty and dread for a few moments at least.

"I'll be there some day," Jerry promised as the last flicker passed. "I'll bet your father's being taken over beyond that line of fire and smoke. I'll find him when I march alongside Pershing into Berlin."

"If they've taken him over there, I'll find him before that!" exclaimed Tod.

“ You wouldn’t go over on the other side? ” asked Jerry incredulously.

“ Wouldn’t I though! Just the minute I’m sure he’s out of this country, I’m following, don’t you forget that.”

“ And I’m with you, old man, don’t *you* forget that.”

“ But your folks? ”

“ They’ve given their consent to let me enlist. I can enlist over there just as well. I wish we’d hear from those detectives. That Moody’s the only one in the whole lot with a thimbleful of brains.”

Ten o’clock came and then eleven, and still no word had come, so they finally went to bed. In the morning they found Essex awaiting them as they passed through the lobby, but he had no news save a bare acknowledgment that they had trace of an automobile which might turn out to be the one they sought. Moody wanted to see them, he admitted further, and had made an appointment for twelve o’clock at his room on Ninety-seventh Street. Then Essex, having performed his duty, sauntered away.

The boys put in the forenoon as best they

could. Noon found them knocking at a door on the second floor of a second-rate rooming house. Peters opened the door and asked them to come in. He was expecting Moody any minute, he said.

But Moody did not show up for a half hour or more, and when he came he was in surly humor. To the boys' eager questions he answered merely yes and no, and his return questions were the curtest. Chiefly he asked about the fat woman who had sat next to Mr. Fulton in the street car. Had she looked foreign—did she speak brokenly? He was impatient to the point of anger when both boys insisted that she had used the broadest Irish brogue.

He then produced a picture, one printed on the back of a small card. Did this resemble the woman? Jerry objected that the picture was that of a man. What difference did that make? Couldn't a boy answer a plain question?

Tod admitted that there might be a resemblance. Moody then asked: Had his father ever mentioned a man by the name of Larish—or Engleking? He had not. Tod was sure.

That was all, said Moody, and he and Peters turned to leave the room, leaving the boys no choice but to follow. At the corner Peters pointed. "There's your car," he hinted, and he and Moody went on across the street.

"It's a pity detectives can't be human," remarked Jerry. "I guess they get used to thinking of everybody as a prospective criminal. They sure gave us the third degree."

"For half a cent I'd notify the police. They couldn't blunder a bit more than these fellows, and there's more of them. One at least might get run over by a real idea." Tod was as bitter as his chum. "Everything that's been discovered, we dug up—or *you* did," generously.

"Not much use of our going back to the hotel. They won't come near us again until they want some more information. Let's just hike out and walk all the way back."

From Ninety-seventh Street to the heart of the so-called downtown district is considerable hike, and the boys only sauntered most of the way, but they made it in a little over two hours. Footsore and weary, they went up to their rooms, halted in the lobby by the desk clerk,

who inquired after Mr. Fulton. Tod felt that frankness was well-nigh necessary, so he said:

“My father has disappeared. We suspect foul play, but secret service men who are on the case have not been able to learn anything definite. We are keeping it as quiet as possible—and you will want to, too, for the sake of the hotel—but you needn’t worry any; he left me a generous expense allowance, enough to cover our hotel bill and then some. I’ll let you know just as soon as we find out anything.”

The man thanked him for his frankness, and assured the boys that it had not been worry over payment that had prompted his inquiry.

They found a note from Essex shoved under the door. It was brief.

“Look in the papers. *Your* submarine was captured by a French liner—and no Mr. Fulton aboard. Sx.”

“Huh—the mean-dispositioned baby. Carries a grudge instead of a nursing bottle. How does he know it was that submarine, I’d like to know.”

“Guess we’d better read the papers, Tod, and maybe we’ll find out. I’ll get a bell boy

to buy us a handful from the news-stand off the lobby.”

When they read the brief account they were sure the detective had been right. It was practically the same in all the papers, a dispatch from London, with only the comments differing.

“London, September 10. French armored cruiser *Selim* reports sinking a German submarine and capturing her crew of sixteen. The captain and first mate were killed and several were drowned by the swamping of one of the *Selim*’s boats in the heavy sea. The U-boat fired two torpedoes at the *Selim*, which had been warned of the presence of submarine by the White Star liner *Cedric*, three days out of New York.”

“It doesn’t say dad wasn’t on board,” objected Tod.

“No—but it would have said so if he had been. Guess Essex was right all right.”

“I don’t guess anything of the sort. We’ll watch the later editions. They may have a fuller report.”

“We’ll sure do that,” assented Jerry, but there was no enthusiasm in his voice.

When they went down to dinner a few hours later Tod sat with a great bunch of newspapers beside him and one propped up before his face. One by one, he threw them aside in disgust.

“Not a line,” he wailed, almost on the point of tears. “They’ve forgotten it happened.”

They went to bed early that night, with no further word either from the sunken submarine and her crew, or the three detectives. Jerry woke up with a toothache; he refused breakfast and set out at once to hunt a dentist. He promised to have it out with that tooth before many minutes had passed. But the first dental office he entered had a waiting line that made Jerry clasp his jaw and hurry out again and down the noisy stairs — why are dentists always upstairs, anyway, with each step an eternity of waning determination?

The next dentist was not so prosperous. He sat in his own operating chair, lazily puffing a cigarette.

“Well, young man,” he greeted gayly, “out with it! I destroy in an instant what nature took years to build.”

“It isn’t what nature took years to build

that I have any quarrel with. It's what I went to sleep without and woke up with this morning. If you can take out the ache I'll be satisfied to keep the acher."

"All right, let's have a look at it. I'm afraid, son, that you're a poor farmer. You've had that acre sowed in the same crop too long. But you're enough of a farmer to know there's only one thing to do with a stump in your row—that's get it out."

"All right, as long as you don't yank it the same way dad did on our pasture lot—blow 'em out with blasting powder."

"Hold your mouth open while I look at it. A little wider so that I can see if the one next to it is affected. Let me examine it with this little tool. . . . Did it hurt you any?"

"Just a dollar's worth, doctor. I'm much obliged."

Jerry was still in no mood for breakfast, so he went directly to the room. He had been there perhaps fifteen minutes when there came the sound of hurrying footsteps in the hall. The door was unlocked and thrown violently open. A wildly excited boy burst in.

“ Jerry — Jerry! ” he shouted. “ I was dead right. Dad’s there — he’s safe. He was on that submarine — yessiree! Jerusha, boy, he’s safe.”

“ Come down to earth, Tod. I’ve just had a tooth yanked. What’s it all about? ”

“ You didn’t see the papers? More news about that submarine. Two civilians on it, Jerry, and both of them claim they’re Americans. And one of them, you can bet your hat, is my dad! ”

“ What are you going to do? ”

“ Do? *Do!* Get on the first liner that makes Havre — that’s where the *Selim* put in — and have ’em let dad loose, and you’re going along. Come on down. We’re going to book our passage in about two jiffs. I’ve got plenty of money to see us through.”

CHAPTER VI

ACROSS THE WATER

After sober second thought Jerry doubted whether Tod's plan was a very wise one. But Tod had no such doubts. He had fully made up his mind, and nothing Jerry could say would alter it. As to Jerry's proposal that they wait and talk it over with the three detectives before deciding finally, he flatly refused. They had bungled everything so far; he and Jerry were under no obligations to consult Essex and his crew. Not a word should be said to them. That was final.

So Jerry gave in, secretly a bit glad to do so. They bought a paper and looked up the steamship sailings. They were of course too late for that day, but the *Sisera*, a ten day boat, sailed the next morning at ten. It seemed that a party of investigators had taken all the remaining first cabin accommodations, so the two boys had to be satisfied with second-class. But that made little difference to them. They were too

young and full of animal spirits to be the least snobbish, and to them, unused to ship travel as they were, the fare and the service simply surpassed belief.

They came near missing the boat as it was, for just as they were ready to leave the hotel, with an ample margin of time, Essex came drifting aimlessly in. The boys might have walked out and left him there to his own devices only they were carrying their suit cases, and they could hardly have avoided explanations. However, just as they were about to despair, Essex wandered out as leisurely as he had come in.

The boys almost stepped on his heels in their eagerness to get to the boat in time. As usual, however, they arrived at the dock with a good margin to spare; sailing had been delayed an hour to allow some last-minute repairs. Then they were off.

It was a pleasant voyage, with fair weather all but two days. Neither boy was seasick, though the first rough morning, which came when they were four days out, left Jerry with a qualmish feeling in the pit of his stomach. Tod kept the deck like an old tar, and the more

the ship rolled the gayer he felt. Once when the wind whipped and whistled, and Jerry hiked for the shelter of his six-by-eight, Tod only laughed and said, "This is something like!" He was in high spirits anyway, for he was on his way to rescue his father.

They made many friends on the voyage, for they were lively, approachable boys and did not stand much on ceremony. A jolly-faced old fellow spied them out on their second day and promptly introduced himself. "I'm Bill Clifton, from Chicago. Now I wonder who the deuce you two are."

"Jerry Ring, for myself, and this is Tod Fulton — from Watertown."

"No wonder you take to the ocean — raised in a town with a name like that. Where's your chaperon?"

"We're out on our own hook."

"Bill" Clifton shook his head soberly. "A bit young, you two, to be going to the other side these times. I have a son who made the trip, and now I'm going over to see him, for maybe the last time. He's about ready to go to the firing line. He's a captain of one of

the first companies to come over. You people can be thankful you're not old enough to be drawn into this horrible affair."

"But I'm going into it," declared Jerry. "It may be a horrible affair, but I want to see it made more horrible for the ones who started it than for the ones who come in to finish it."

"That's all right," agreed the man condescendingly, "and it sounds fine on Fourth of July, but oratory doesn't mean much when it's your own flesh and blood that's paying the price."

"Huh, that Fourth of July stuff is going out of fashion, along with big firecrackers and the other big noise-makers. We've got so used to running ourselves down, we Americans, that we sometimes forget that that quiet something inside of us that sits up and takes notice when the other fellow steps on our Yankee toes, means the same as when the Frenchman throws his cap in the air and shouts 'Vive la France!' We're twice as patriotic as we're willing to admit."

"Bully for you, Jerry!" exclaimed Tod. "If I hadn't heard your dad spouting that, I'd think

you made it all up yourself." But there was honest admiration in his heart, at that.

"It's true, just the same."

"You're right; it is," Mr. Clifton seconded. "But you can't blame an old codger for grumbling at giving up his only son."

Twice on the way across they were halted, once by an American cruiser, and once by a British patrol boat. As they neared the Irish coast, a wireless warned them that U-boats were about, but they sighted the French coast near evening of the tenth day without having seen a periscope. Their port was Havre, the very one into which the *Selim* had put with her prisoners.

Tod was confident that not many hours would elapse before he saw his father.

They took leave of Mr. Clifton on shore, after having passed through the red tape of the customs office. He directed them to a hotel and remarked cordially as he turned away: "Now, remember, if you don't find things as easy as you expected, my son will be glad to help you. I'll tell him about you, and if he has a chance, he may look you up. He's *Captain* Bill, and

he's with the Illinois Infantry. Good-bye — good luck."

When he was out of sight Jerry turned to Tod. "How much of your high school French do you remember? You used to be a shark with irregular verbs, I recollect."

" 'Used to be' is right. I can conjugate *avoir* in all its moods and tenses, but — "

"But *avoir* means 'to have' — and what we want is 'to get.' "

"All right, *get* a move on, then. In the meanwhile I'll gather up all the stray *parlez-vous* words I can think of and fire them at the hotel clerk all at once. Which corner was it where Mr. Clifton said we turned? "

"The fourth one after we passed the big square thing back there with the flag on it. Two more blocks. Then two blocks to the right — what's that maniac shouting at us back there? Do you suppose we've gone and broken some law, unbeknownst? "

"Jerusha, I don't know. He hasn't said a word yet that I ever heard before. Reckon he never took the trouble to read Fraser and Squair's French Grammar. Let's stop and

maybe he'll consent to honor us with the *Marseillaise* or something I've heard before."

So they stopped. A greatly excited man, hobbling along with a sawed-off crutch, was waving his free arm at them and shouting as he pegged along. Out of breath, finally, he stopped a dozen feet away and gasped:

"Jeeminy Jeruseelum, w'at a run yo' geeve me. I, me, Louie Blize, am off Newyorik. Yo' *mus* haf guide. I am. I—"

But the two disgusted boys walked off in the middle of his speech, whereupon he descended to the freedom of his native tongue, which, fortunately, the boys could not understand.

In their excitement, however, they made the wrong turn, and no Hotel Lorraine met their eyes when they had traveled the required distance. They went on a block or two farther, but they were now well into the residence district. A gendarme passing gave Tod an idea. Approaching the man, he began desperately:

"Pardonnez moi, monsieur, je desirez vous in — inquier — quoi — no, que — Jerry, what in thunder's the word for 'where'?"

"'Ainsi' — no, that means 'but' or 'and' "

or something. Don't ask me. You know I'd have flunked my French if it hadn't been for your help. Ask the man. He must know."

The gendarme looked at them gravely, curiously. "*Certainement, messieurs*, it is 'ou.' What is it you wish to ask me?"

"Gee whiz!" exclaimed Tod. "What a relief. We're looking for the Lorraine—it's a hotel. We lost our way."

"You have indeed lost it considerably. However, if you will walk with me I can take you within sight of it."

"We certainly thank you. I don't know what we'd have done if we hadn't run into you. All the French I know wouldn't get me a piece of pie at a railroad restaurant—"

"Pie is American, I believe. But we have tarts that are very much—"

"Ah, that was only a figure of speech. What I meant is that I can't make myself understood—"

"But all you have to do is to stop most anyone. You'll find we French are courteous to strangers, especially Americans—"

"Still, there's a difference between courtesy

and comprehension. If I tried to ask a man what time it was, he'd think I was offering to steal his watch."

"Ah, I see. It is the language you mean. You will hardly walk a block anywhere in France without finding someone who understands United States. Myself, I am French born but with my parents I lived in Baltimore for twenty years until this war broke out. I must leave you now. Your hotel stands at the beginning of the next block. I know the proprietor well. He is a good fellow—and he can *parlez-vous* with you in your own tongue—slang and all. *Bon jour, mes amis,*" and the friendly gendarme had turned the corner.

The proprietor of the Lorraine, Jules Vivendi, was indeed a good fellow of good fellows, and his chef was worthy of a poet's praise. The boys were well-nigh starved as they ordered dinner, but they lingered over the savory food that was served. The waiter, a man who had lost his right arm at Verdun, he said, deplored the scarcity of sugar and wheat flour, and apologized for the slimness of the menu, but the boys scarcely listened.

As they were eating dessert, the proprietor himself came up.

“I am Jules,” he said in English with a decided New York twang to it. “I see you are Americans, so I says to myself, ‘Jules, you better butt in and make yourself around. Them boys are on their lone—they needs a listen of their own chin music. So here I comes. Gentlemen, I am at your service.”

“We had a good word of you, once from an American, a Mr. Clifton, and once from a Frenchman. You are right: we are on our lone. I am Tod Fulton, and this is my friend Jerry Ring. We have come over here to get my father. He was on that submarine that was captured by the *Selim*. You may remember when the prisoners were brought in a couple of weeks ago. There were two Americans among them; my father was one of them. Perhaps you can tell us where we can get some information.

“I am not sure—Mike. I will learn. I do not remember of the prisoners brought in. How came your father to be on a German sub?”

“It’s a long story, and most of it I am not

at liberty to tell—it's a military secret, Mr. —Jules. You will understand — ”

“ Oh, certainly—you're the doctor. Wise me up or shut me up. I'll play the ball-base. To-morrow morning I will tell you where to go to and that's the plenty. Sleep on easy street—Jules is the bird.”

“ There is no chance to-night — ”

“ Not a smell of a look-in. After the clock is nine — ” Jules gave a shrug that said as plainly as his final words: “ the stuff she is all off.”

So perforce Tod and Jerry patiently awaited the morning, arising early to stir up a proper appetite for the chef's delicious breakfast. This time they were favored by a sight of that individual, a bent and bewrinkled old woman, close-crowding seventy years, her face seamed in benevolent creases and her capable hands gnarled and twisted by age and hard work.

“ Notice that? ” asked Jerry. “ We haven't seen a single able-bodied man about. Even Jules walks with a limp. The Germans weren't far wrong when they said they would ‘ bleed white ’ poor France.”

"I'll bet the firing line doesn't look white to those same Germans, especially when the poilus swarm up over the trench tops for an attack. No doubt, as Professor Blake used to say in his regular Monday morning lecture, 'the wish is father to the thought.'"

"Sounds too much like Blake to fit this case. However, let's see what the old lady has manufactured out of sawdust and glucose this morning. I'm hungry as a bear."

Jules came in while they were still at breakfast. His beaming face assured them that he bore good news.

"Top o' the early day," he greeted. "I trust you have sleep well. I have been inquire and this is the dope. No prisoners are at Havre. All are at the detention camps, and *they* are all on the quiet. The commandant, Monsieur Bleriot, who used to be a sausage maker—and still is," grimly, "for the poor locoed Germans—can be seen between nine and eleven, but not to-day, unless you have a special permit, which comes from one Sergeant-Major McAlpine, whose name is Scotch but who savvies nothing but French. He is to be found

at that little flat building you passed as you came from the railroad station—the one with the flag. You can tell him that Jules sent you and I think—I think possibly he will see you.”

The name Jules did indeed prove to be the magic word. For his sake the sergeant-major even managed a few words of English, though, truth to tell, they were largely in the way of profanity. He remembered, the interpreter explained, the *Selim* affair perfectly—had, in fact, examined all the prisoners. No, there had been none among them by the name of Fulton. Positively sure; one of the Americans was of German parentage. It was proved that he had been serving with the submarine crew, and he had been sent along to the detention camp. The other was colored. He was named Williams, and had been picked up from one of the steamers sunk by the submarine, and rescued through some whim of the crew. He had been released and was probably still somewhere in the neighborhood of Havre.

The boys felt their high hopes sink lower and lower. Neither one, after they had started on their voyage, had had any doubt of the

outcome. It did not seem possible that they could have been mistaken.

“Of the Germans themselves — were they all members of the crew?” inquired Tod, with a last glimmer of hope. “Was there one who called himself Von Halle or Henderson?”

The sergeant-major shook his head. “There was a full crew, save only for the captain, who was drowned. None by that name was among them. I’m afraid, boy, that you have come on a wild goose chase. If you wish to see the commandant I will do my best to get you to him, ~~but~~ I do not see what good it would do.”

The boys could see no benefit either, and soon after they went back to the Lorraine, silently pondering this new turn of affairs.

“Guess we weren’t so wise after all. Maybe those detectives were right,” admitted Tod as they paused before the hotel, for some reason unwilling to go in and face the genial Jules and his friendly curiosity. “We could have accomplished just as much by cabling, and we’d have saved a lot of time.”

“But how about the man who jumped off the *Cedric*? You know, Tod, I’m not quite sat-

isfied in my mind yet that we were all wrong. We just jumped to the wrong conclusion — that the submarine the *Selim* sank was *our* submarine. *That* one went through — or under — the blockade, that's all. By now, that Henderson — and your father, I'll bet — are in Berlin, talking it over with the Kaiser. And Berlin isn't so many miles away, as we measure distances back home."

"No, but it might as well be on the other side the moon for all we'll see it. If he's there, I suppose dad's safe enough. But it's good-bye to the Fulton Aeroplane, that's all."

"There's never anything sure about an aeroplane, you know that, Tod, and I'm not ready to give up all hope yet. As long as my dad doesn't cable me and tell me I've *got* to come home, I'm still on the job. I'm just stuck as to what's to be our next step."

"If we try any of this Berlin business, I think our next step will be the goose step. But I expect we'd better cable Moody and find out what they've found out, if anything. If they have — or haven't — we might as well go back home."

“ Nothing doing on that, Tod. Tell you what we’ll do — as soon as we hear from Moody. You remember my Uncle Dan? He’s the one I went to visit summer before last when you and your dad went up into Wisconsin fishing. Uncle Dan’s over here, ‘ somewhere in France.’ We’ll look him up and he’ll tell us what to do. Uncle Dan’s worth a whole carload of detectives.”

CHAPTER VII

AT THE AMERICAN CAMP

So they turned then, and instead of going into the hotel, they sought out the business section of Havre. They were some time finding a telegraph office, and then they ran into further difficulty. The censor eyed their brief dispatch with considerable suspicion, and only a complete rehearsal of their case finally won it through for them.

"Now," said Jerry, "the day's work is done, so we can drift about and amuse ourselves." But there was little to amuse in this war-stricken city, far back from the fighting front as it was, though there was much to interest. There was a certain grim earnestness about the usually light-hearted people. On the streets they met few men, and they generally in uniform or obviously unfit for service on account of age. Women were working everywhere, and old men and cripples.

After a while the boys drifted back toward

the water front. Here at least was something that smacked of normal, everyday life. An old sailor sat on a keg of spikes down on an abandoned wharf, smoking a cutty pipe and gazing out to sea with distance-bleared eyes. Even here in a French port, no one would ever have mistaken him for anything but the Scotsman he was.

The boys leaned up against a wrecked bit of unloading gear near by, hoping that he would notice them. Truth to tell, they were a bit weary of a city full of strangers, having been now some weeks without sight of a home face. There was something about the square-chinned, blue-eyed, sun-and-weather-tanned tar that spoke of home, and the boys felt lonesome for his company.

A hearty bellow soon told them that their ruse had worked. "Keel-haul me for a land-lubber if here aren't two eels from the land of dollars and dimes. And where's yer nurse, might I ask?"

There was just the barest hint of a burr in his tongue, but his dialect was of the sea rather than the heather.

"We've each got two nurses, and they're both with us," commented Jerry, displaying a presentable pair of fists.

"You've a better pair in yer heels, I'm thinkin'," said the man with a grin. "I'm Jock McPherson, and who might the two of ye be?"

"Jerry Ring and Tod Fulton."

"Then it's you that's Ring, showin' yer dukes as if you ought to be in one," shrewdly. "I see the two of ye plant yerselves yon and sayin' to yerselves: 'There sits a sailorman from foreign parts and many's the yarn he'd spin over his cutty pipe if we give him half the chanct. Ah, ye needn't be denyin' it—I seen it in yer eye.'"

So the boys confessed, and then begged for a yarn.

"Huh, it's gin'rally to ten-year-olds I tells my tales, and not in a Frinch port either. Ye'll be wantin' a yarn with red-blood in it and a touch of rough work, and maybe a swear word or two. Oh, the boys of this day and age," and he sighed, but spoiled the sigh with a wink at Tod.

The sun was shining hot and steady, and the breeze was sultry from the land, but there on that pitchy, rosin-oozing dock the two boys chilled and shivered as Jock told them a tale of the frozen North, of a boy who went up a coward and came back a man and a hero; of a captain who threw away the lives of his crew and then gave his own to save that of a cabin boy who had been crippled by a wounded walrus. It took many fillings of the pipe, and many "go on's" from the boys to finish the tale.

And then the two discovered that they had stayed long in the land of ship-crushing ice floes—the telegraph office was closed, and in these days of war and censorship one had to receive his message in person.

But they went back to the hotel and made all arrangements for their departure early next morning. They could get a train for the interior at ten o'clock. By that time they hoped to have had an answer to their cable, and to have wheedled a passport out of Sergeant-Major McAlpine or the commandant himself, since they could hardly hope to get very far without that flimsy bit of paper.

They were up at six next morning, but did not breakfast till seven. Breakfast was not quite the satisfying meal it had been the morning before—the city of Havre had suddenly run out of sugar. Somehow, molasses does not seem to give quite the tang to coffee that a pair of heaping teaspoonsful of sugar does.

They carried their suit-cases down to the station and left them there, secretly much pleased to note that Jules had pasted a gaudy-colored label on the end of each case. The sergeant-major they found had left the city, to be gone two or three days. There was nothing to do but chance getting their plea over with Monsieur Bleriot, the commandant. There would be no chance to get at him until nine, and it was now only a little after eight, so they decided to visit the telegraph office first.

The sharp-eyed censor pricked up his ears as they came in. “Well?” he said gruffly.

“Any answer to our cable?” asked Tod, as shortly as his easy good nature would permit.

“Yes,” answered the man, “but I’ve a mind not to let you have it. It sounds too much like a code message to be innocent.”

“ I assure you — ”

“ Assurances don't go far these days, my son. But here it is.”

Tod took the piece of paper, a puzzled look on his face as he read the six words to Jerry:

“ ‘ Submarine right. Traced Jersey coast. Alive.’ Jerusha, Jerry, what's it mean? ”

“ Just what it says — can't you read in between? ‘ You were right about the submarine theory. We traced the big man to the Jersey coast, where he could only have escaped by boat. Your father was with him, and alive.’ Simple as A-B-C.”

“ Then it's A-B-C of the Greek alphabet. It's all right, Mr. Censor. There's nothing harmful in that message. We're much obliged to you for letting us have it. Good-bye.”

“ Just a minute, son. There's a toll on that message — thirty francs, please.”

“ Hang that Moody. If he had to send it collect, he might at least have made the charges in American money.”

“ Six dollars will do very nicely,” said the censor. “ Pay it to the young lady there at the window.”

It was now a few minutes after nine, so they made all haste to get under way to the commandant's office. A long line was ahead of them, and Jerry's heart sank. Their train left at ten even, only forty minutes away. Ten of those minutes were needed to get to the station.

But it was soon evident that Monsieur Bleriot was no waster of words. Doubtless his sausage-making experience had taught him the value of saving everything. The line melted away like a charging company before a battery of machine guns. Even as he was noting the fact that they were one nearer the door, that door would open and disgorge the man who had moved them up the notch.

Jerry expected a bull-necked, roaring sort of a person as they finally pushed open the door and entered. The room was empty save for a slender, black-clad man whose very back as he stood gazing out the window, suggested the scholar. He turned, and his thin, mild face lit up with a smile.

"Well, well — boys! And American boys, or I miss my guess. What is it you wish? Passports?"

"Yes, if you please. You see, we —"

"You wish to go where?"

"We don't know. You see I have an uncle —"

"General Pershing's general headquarters — your uncle is a soldier, is he not? Name?"

"Captain Daniel Ring."

"Your father's brother, eh?"

"Yes—but how did you—"

"It's my business to know. Why do you wish to see him?"

"We are alone here, seeking Tod's father, Mr. Fulton, who has disappeared — carried off, we are afraid, by the Germans. We want Uncle Dan's advice."

"I see. Sergeant-Major McAlpine told me about you. I have investigated your story. I expected you in yesterday. Here are your passports. Take the train to S——. You change at Epigny and again at Carivale."

"We can never thank you enough —"

"More than enough. Come back and tell me about it when the war is over. There's no one waiting *ahead* of you. Good luck to you."

"Whew!" exclaimed Tod as they breathed

outdoor air once more. "I felt as if I were being shot through a gun. Two minutes or less we were in there."

"Yes, and two minutes more and we'd better be on the train, or we'll wait over a day. Are you up to sprinting for it?"

Tod was, and they made a merry race of it. "Here we are," gasped Tod, as they came in sight of the station clock, "and seven good minutes to spare!"

"I'd rather have seven of my good minutes than one of your bad minutes, with the tail end of the train just disappearing around the bend. Did you ever see such a weird locomotive in your life—and the cars! Let's get our luggage and then hunt out our little cubbyhole. Travel's light to-day; we may have a whole compartment to ourselves."

That proved to be the case, at least for the first stage of the journey, which took nearly three hours. Then they changed to a local train that was half as fast and twice as jolty, where they were crowded in with two others—both fat and fussy. Fortunately, at the end of an hour they changed cars and trains again,

and they were once more alone in their tiny space. They had no idea how far it was to their final station, so when an hour passed and then two, and still they sped on, they began to worry. This was a fast train. Perhaps, after all, it did not make their stop. Had they been able to look into the other compartments they would have lost their worry, for it was well loaded with men in khaki, men who smoked and chatted in good old Yankee style.

However, a whistling in the air, and a creaking and groaning of brakes suddenly announced that here was a station the lordly locomotive would consent to notice. A preliminary jolt or two, and then a lurch that ended in a dead stop. The guard came and opened their door.

“Eet ees yur get-off-a-place,” he announced, evidently very proud of the accomplishment of that sentence.

“All right, Tod; pile out.”

“Pilot?” asked the guard. “Oh, monsieur weesh one guide? There iss no need. See?”

The boys saw. The town was all open to the naked eye—less than two hundred houses, aside from those hastily put up a little dis-

tance away to take care of a considerable military establishment. Tents beyond these, and brown dots moving about, told Jerry that here was a part of Uncle Sam's advance guard in the cause of civilization. Part of that advance guard was out on the platform, streaming out of the compartment doors and clattering across the uneven boards in noisy good spirits.

One of these spied the two boys. "Well what do you know?" he shouted to his companions. "Here's something at last that looks like home and mother. All here but the apron strings."

A score or more, youngsters themselves for the most part, stopped in a circle about the two embarrassed boys. Personal comments came thick, some of them far from complimentary. Jerry stood it as long as he could. Then in a slight lull of the pleasantries he remarked coolly:

"No wonder the Kaiser isn't afraid of America."

It was a dead-center bull's-eye. No one had an answer, until finally the one who had begun it all came forward. "Good for you, kid. You're *there*! Come over to enlist, did you?"

Jerry suspected that the wily tease was laying a trap for him, so he said nothing, but Tod answered frankly:

“ We’ve come on a life-and-death errand. After we’ve finished that job, if you chaps haven’t finished yours, we’ll jump in and help.”

“ That’s fair enough,” laughed the soldier good-humoredly. “ Come on, if you’re going to town. Perhaps I can steer you to where you want to go.”

The rest of the crowd had moved on, seeing that there was to be no further fun.

“ My name’s Dick Hampton, private, from St. Louis — ”

Jerry introduced Tod and himself, and chattering in friendly fashion the three moved down the one street of the little town.

“ I expect we’ll have to go straight to General Pershing,” Tod remarked after their errand had been explained. “ We’re looking for Jerry’s uncle.”

“ What’s his name? Your own name sounds kind of familiar to me,” turning to Jerry. “ Maybe I know the man.”

“ Daniel Ring — ”

“ No — can’t say I know Daniel — ”

“ Captain Ring — ”

“ Oh, yes I do. That is, I know who he is. Of course, we privates don’t hobnob much with the officers. Biggest man I know outside of our own company, is a second lieutenant, and I got to know him when he was a third sergeant. *Captain Ring* — why, he’s at the next camp, less than four miles north. His company was with our bunch for about a month.”

“ Will we be allowed to walk over there? ”

“ Sure thing — if you get our colonel’s O. K. on your passports. You might even get a ride over. There’s a truck goes over every afternoon about five. Get a move on and maybe you can make it. Here’s the colonel’s tent just ahead of us.”

The colonel himself was standing just outside the fly of the tent, talking with two captains. The boys waited until the two had saluted and gone on down the camp “ street,” when Private Hampton saluted and said:

“ Colonel, here are two youngsters from back home who came over here to look for this lad’s father, who was carried off by the Germans.

They didn't find him, and they want to talk over their next move with this boy's uncle. He's Captain Ring, at Camp Nine."

The colonel looked the two boys over, a whimsical smile lighting up his face. "I'll O. K. the passports all right, but they'll have to talk to Custer himself about the ride. I'm boss of everything else but that truck and its driver."

He scribbled his initials on the passports and the boys thanked him, saluted, and followed Hampton over to the edge of camp.

"I say, Cuss," drawled Hampton, coming up to a shirt-sleeved man who had the hood thrown back and was grunting over the engine of his truck, "will your old rattle-box carry a couple of passengers —"

"Heh!" growled the man, emerging from the depths and turning an oil-streaked face to them. "'Gainst orders to carry civilians. I guess you know that."

"Yesterday it was against orders to carry men in uniform."

"'Gainst orders to carry anybody who hasn't a civil tongue for his elders and betters."

"Oh, I didn't want to ride myself. But

here's a couple of boys from the States. The colonel says you were boss of your own machine, and he wouldn't promise them a ride, but if you were in your usual good humor, maybe they could coax you to take 'em along. Nephew of Cap Ring, he is," nodding toward Jerry.

"I may not ride myself," grunted Custer, with what the boys assumed was consent to Hampton's plea. "The old thingumbob that moves this contraption don't just do it."

"You climb in, Cuss; I'll fix her for you in a jiff. Remember how I made her go the time we got stuck on Three-Mile Hill? Why, here's what's the matter with it. Somebody's dropped a nut in here, where it don't belong. It would have rattled out in a mile if you could just have got her to go. Got the juice on; I'll crank her for you."

"Huh!" grunted Cuss, putting his foot on the lever. That was one of the standing jokes of the camp, Custer's machine being the only one near there with a self-starter, and he was correspondingly proud.

"You dropped that nut in there yourself, you reprobate." Then to the boys: "I'll take

you over to Camp Nine, but you won't find Captain Ring there. He's been gone a week, and maybe he won't come back at all. He's figuring on going into the air service."

CHAPTER VIII

OSKEY-WOW-WOW!

“How far are we from the fighting front?” ventured Tod, when the preliminary explosions had settled down to a steady roar.

“I don’t know,” answered Custer shortly. “Five or fifty miles—that’s one of the things we don’t discuss,” he added more sociably.

“Where did Captain Ring go to? Or is that another of the things you don’t discuss?” asked Jerry.

“He went to Camp Fourteen; that’s maybe twenty miles away. Maybe our colonel can tell you when he will be back—if he’s coming back. Here’s a bad piece of road,” intended no doubt as a stop to the conversation.

Those four miles to Camp Nine were never American miles—unless they were like the one the Hoosier meant when he said: “It’s a mile up over the hill ef ye go through the holler, but they ain’t no road through the holler.” The truck made hard work of it, and toward the end

developed an asthmatic tendency that distressed the boys but did not seem to worry their driver in the least. "She's got one bad lung," he confessed. "Usual, about this time one of the valves jolts open, but it's a heap sight wuss if I stop to fix it and let her get cold. Besides, here we are in sight of the camp."

If the other camp had looked trim and businesslike, then there were no words fit to describe the absolute neatness and precision of Camp Nine. The boys easily saw the reason for this when, after much red tape, they were finally allowed to come into the presence of Colonel Saunders. He looked as if he had just stepped out of the bandbox we read about. His snapping black eyes and close-trimmed mustache convinced one that here was a real *he* man; determination and aggressiveness were written all over his features. You knew the minute you looked at him that he never had to hunt for anything; everything had its place and was in it.

But it was evident at once that he did not like boys—or perhaps he felt that boys had no business mixing in with man-size work. He

was not long in letting the two know that he thought they had acted mighty foolishly, and that if he had the authority—and he wasn't so sure but that he had—he would pack them out on the first train and across on the first boat.

“Nephew of Captain Ring, eh?” he grunted. “Thought any nephew of his would have had more sense than to come over here at a time like this. A wild goose chase, I call it, and I can soon figure out which are the geese. I'll talk this affair over with the captain when he comes, and we'll decide what to do with you; but there won't be any more of these circus detective stunts.”

With that he dismissed them, but Jerry had come too near losing his temper several times in the conversation to be put out now without some satisfaction.

“Colonel Saunders,” he said as curtly as the other had spoken, “when will my uncle be back?”

“I don't know.”

“Who does, then?”

“Why?”

“I intend to find out how long we are to wait. We may not linger for your shipping instructions. Who does know when he is due back?”

“There’s only one man who does. You can ask him the minute he shows up at roll call.”

“Who is he?”

“Captain Daniel Ring. Orderly, see that these boys have a tent to sleep in while they await the return of Captain Ring—and see that they take care of it themselves. Let the quartermaster issue them blanket rolls.”

Jerry went out of the tent boiling inwardly, but Tod was too downcast to feel anything so petty very keenly. He had taken the colonel’s scathing criticism of their harebrained adventure pretty much to heart, not because it was criticism, but because he feared that they had wasted a lot of valuable time.

“What company is Captain Ring’s?” he finally roused himself enough to ask.

“Company K, the crack company of the regiment. Nobody around here can figure out what bug’s got into the man to want to leave a company like that and go into the air service. But

all of a sudden he starts talking aeroplanes — wouldn't give the colonel any rest until he gave his consent. That's what he's about now: he's gone over to the American aviation camp. Just among the three of us, Uncle Dan's a pretty close friend of mine, and he told me he'd be back within the week. His time's up about to-morrow, so I don't think you'll have so very long to wait."

After this bit of kindness the orderly did not have the heart to ask the boys to put up their own tent, knowing that the two amateurs at the job would soon be surrounded by a throng of teasing soldiers who had themselves learned the trick of putting up a tent to the tune of jeers and laughter. Down next the big supply tent stood an empty canvas hastily thrown up to house some supplies brought in a few days before in the rain. He halted the boys before this and suggested:

"Bring your dunnage over here and use this as your hang-out. I guess you can eat at the regular mess—if you can stand it. It isn't often we have Yankee youngsters as guests. And don't mind the joshing of the fellows;

they're a pretty good bunch, if I do say it myself."

Unfortunately, it was already well past mess time, and the boys looked forward with feelings far from pleasurable to a supperless night. However, their fears were unfounded, for Custer also had come in late for mess, and the driver generously suggested that a plate be dished up for the boys as well. It was not the daintiest fare in the world, but it was substantial; Custer admitted that it was excellent training for life in the trenches. It was the finest feed for a soldier, said he, for with so little to live for, why should one fear to die? One of the soldiers had that evening found an extra large piece of meat in his beef stew and was now teasing the camp mascot with it. He had tied a piece of rope around it and now found it tough enough to hold the big bulldog, dangling and struggling, clear of the ground.

But Jerry and Tod found their portion tender enough, and the portion of beans served with the stew was savory and the bread was solid but chewable. Custer, for all his wrangling over his food, stowed away a goodly por-

tion of it, finishing with a sigh of satisfaction.

Life here at the camp, the boys found, after they were ready to look about a bit, was not quite what they had pictured it. True, most of their imagination had been spent on the actual trench side of it. Here they found that affairs were much the same as in any well-conducted civil community, save that each wore a uniform and performed certain duties only found in military life. But aside from the drilling, there were all the things to do that have to be done in ordinary life. There were carpenters busy through the day; there were men ditching, grading, building sewers; there were cooks and tailors and barbers.

Just now most of the men were sitting about in little groups, passing jokes, smoking, playing cards. Some of them were coming back from the little town whose lights showed faintly off through a tiny grove of chestnut trees — Jerry learned that they were chestnuts through the gibes of the men when someone sprang an old joke. Both Jerry and Tod were tired — tired with the trip and the day's disappointments. It was not much after nine o'clock when they

pulled their tent flap to and rolled in under the blankets.

Next minute it was morning and a deep bass voice was sarcastically inquiring outside their tent:

“Do they usually sleep till noon, or is this their day off duty?”

“At least we take only one day off, Uncle Dan,” shouted Jerry, who had recognized his uncle’s voice. “We don’t go gallivanting a whole week at a time. We’ll be out in a jiffy.”

The two boys fairly jumped into their clothes and rushed out on Captain Ring, who forgot his soldierly appearance long enough to give his young nephew a hearty civilian hug, and to shake hands cordially with Tod.

“Son of Inventor Fulton of Watertown, eh?” he asked, looking Tod over carefully. “As old Sime Waters, the town joker, used to say: ‘The only share of his dad’s brains he’s got is his long legs.’ You sure do favor your father there.”

“Did you know my father?”

“Know him! Well, I should guess I did. Why, I’m the one who set him onto the one

big invention of his life, the one that's going to make him famous all over the world before this war is over."

"That's the very thing we came to see you about!" exclaimed both at once. Then Tod went on to explain. "Dad's disappeared. We think he's been kidnapped by the Germans." And then he told the whole story.

"Can you beat it!" exclaimed Captain Ring over and over. "That's why those pesky fellows are so hard to lick. If one way won't work, they try another—any other, it don't make much difference. I think your father is still alive. I figure it out about the same as you do. They got those papers all right, but there was something missing—something that your father understood but that an outsider wouldn't. Of course, their experts probably could figure it out in time, but they were in a hurry. They planned to get your father off somewhere at their mercy and then bribe or force him to reveal the secret. And we know what his answer would be to any proposition like that. What we've got to work out is what would be their next move."

"That's where we thought the submarine came in," explained Jerry.

"Maybe — maybe," conceded his uncle. "They would reason that over here, with everything to gain by giving in, and nothing to lose, either for himself or his country, that he'd listen to their arguments. That may be why they brought him over, or it may be that they are in on another secret — one that I thought I was the only one he had told. They'll never put him out of the way as long as he keeps that to himself."

"What is it?" asked Tod.

"Did he ever tell you anything about a further improvement of that stopping device — no, I thought not. Well, then he probably didn't want you to know. But he told me; that's the reason I have been trying to get into the air service. He promised me that he would see to it that I got to drive the first machine made. And if I can't make a showing against Fritz with the Fulton Aeroplane, then my name is Dennis."

"You'll never do it now."

"No — it looks like it. But there's one thing

we can bank on: It's a good two weeks now since your father disappeared. Within another week or so they'll be turning out Fulton Aeroplanes at Essen, and within a few days we'll know about it."

"But I don't see that knowing about it will help us any. We've got to get busy and do something before then," objected Jerry.

"What can you do? There isn't a thing but sit back and wait. We're in the dark now. I don't know that we can do anything afterwards, except hope for the best. How soon were you chaps figuring on getting back to the U.S.A.?"

"When we can take Mr. Fulton with us—not before."

"That's nonsense, Jerry. I'm going to get a week's leave of absence. I've signed up for the air service, so I guess I can get away all right. I'll show you boys around, and we'll do what we can to get to the bottom of things, but at the end of the week, back you go to the nearest port, and off with you."

"When I ask you to be my guardian you'll hear about it—" began Jerry hotly.

Captain Ring laughed. "How long do you think it would take me to get your father's consent to act in his place for the period of a week, heh? I'm just as anxious as you are to rescue Mr. Fulton, but you can't fly in the face of the impossible, and this comes pretty near being it. We're up against the whole darned German army, and three of us can't expect to do in a few minutes what the combined French and British armies have been trying for over three years to do. Calm down and let's talk horse sense."

While the boys hiked over to the little village and bought themselves breakfast—coffee and rolls—Uncle Dan skirmished about and obtained necessary leave of absence. He obtained more than that: permission to take the two boys on a trip to the fighting front. He commandeered a rickety old automobile and he was waiting beside it when Jerry and Tod came hurrying back.

"Jump in," he said briefly. "We can talk on the way."

He explained his plan. The roads were good; they could reach the front by dark. Good luck

favoring them, they might be able to get out to the firing line with the men who went in at midnight. Of course, they might not be able to get in at all; but there had been little or no real fighting along this particular sector for weeks past and he had no fear that permission would be denied them.

Away they went over the perfect roads, averaging a good twenty-five miles an hour, though the machine seemed about to fall to pieces at each turn of the wheels. Noon found them entering a pretty little town, somewhat scarred by German shells, for they were now along the line where the first German rush had been stemmed. Here they stopped for a hasty bite of lunch, a bite that was as scanty as it was hasty, for all France, and especially the part near the front, was feeling the pinch of food scarcity pretty hard. Neither sugar nor butter was to be had; eggs were bought like precious stones; meat could be obtained only a few days each week. Only a French chef could have made a tasty meal out of what was available, and even this chef had hard work concealing mighty plain dishes under fancy names. However, none

of them were inclined to quarrel with the menu, especially since they had allowed themselves only a brief lunch period.

Up to this time, save for the absence of able-bodied men, there was no sign of war's devastating hand; but from now on there were signs in plenty. Detachments of soldiers were moving everywhere. Great transports, laden with food supplies and ammunition, struggled along the road. Twice, monstrous aeroplanes whirled past overhead. A dull, booming sound came out of the east; the daily cannonade was in full swing. An army ambulance came dashing by, hanging low on its springs. The country here, between towns, was bare. Carefully cultivated France was left behind them; they were on ground that might some day fall into the hands of the enemy; all was in readiness for his coming.

The sun began to drop low and Captain Ring speeded up his machine another notch despite the warning groans of the motor. A flat tire lost them half an hour, as the patch refused to stick. Night seemed to drop down suddenly — and suddenly the road forked. Which way should they turn; Captain Ring was not sure.

Finally he decided to turn to the right. A mile on they came upon the brow of a hill giving upon a wide plain that was cut by a narrow breadth of stream showing silver in the last glow of the sun. "I don't know that river," Captain Ring announced with a frown. "We must have taken the wrong turn back there. The trenches must be on the other side of that ridge yonder — and it's a good ten miles. We'll never make it; we don't dare use our lights. We'd make too good a target."

"But if it's ten miles to the trenches —"

"Too many scouting aeroplanes; they're getting mighty daring with their night flying. However, we'll go ahead as long as the light lasts — and then feel our way as far as we dare."

All was still — a silence that had an ominous feel to it. The explosions of the engine rang out in the evening calm with the din of a cannonade. Jerry thought to himself that the noise was a far worse give-away than their lights could possibly be, but he said nothing; truth to tell, he was a bit afraid of his military uncle, used to implicit obedience as he was. Still, he almost allowed himself an "I told you so"

when, of a sudden, a shout rang out from the hillside.

“Halt!”

The command came in French, and Captain Ring answered calmly in the same language: “Captain Ring of the American forces, and two boys. We are headed for the front, looking for Colonel Etienne’s position. We took the wrong turn and must have come too far south. How far are we from the trenches?”

“Fifteen miles,” came the reply. “Show your papers—and what’s the matter with your muffler? Humph!” as he examined the papers the captain passed to him, by the light of a shielded match. “Humph. Look all right, but I don’t like the idea of that loud motor. How do I know it isn’t a signal?”

“Signal to what?” demanded Jerry incredulously.

“Scouting aeroplanes. They’ve been dropping bombs on us every night now for a week. I’m afraid you’ll have to come along with me to the captain—and leave your machine here. You’ll be bringing the whole German army down on us.”

Captain Ring signaled the two boys to jump out, and the three silently followed their guide, wondering at his distrust of them until they realized that another figure had stepped out of the shadows and was pacing along a few steps behind. They entered a tiny clump of trees, well filled with underbrush. At a slightly heavier clump than usual their leader halted. He gave a series of three knocks on the trunk of a sapling; there was a rustling of leaves, and out of nowhere it seemed came another silent figure. The man who had led them shrugged his shoulders, and nodding slightly toward his three captives, said:

“The noise we heard.”

“Well?” asked the captain.

“Americans, trying to reach the front before dark.”

“Two boys,” remarked the captain, half questioningly, “and who is the man?”

“An officer, an American, Lieutenant King.”

“Ring,” corrected Uncle Dan, “and Captain, not Lieutenant.” His tone was just as casual as the Frenchman’s had been, but he realized that they were testing him.

“ You have examined his papers? ” asked the captain.

“ Yes. They seem all right. ”

“ What have you to say for yourself? ” turning to Captain Ring. “ And just what is your errand? ”

Captain Ring explained patiently.

“ And you are an American? A college man? ”

“ Yes. ”

“ What college? ”

“ University of Illinois. ”

“ Ah. ” He was silent a moment. Then: “ Tell me. In these American institutions they have what they call a yell. Yes? Now in this Illi — this college, what is it the yell they make, heh? ”

Jerry grinned aloud.

“ You mean you want me to give it? ”

“ If you would. ”

It was surely a queer setting for a college yell. Captain Ring gave an embarrassed cough, and then laughed like a boy. “ It’s a rum sort of passport in my opinion, but if you want it, here goes: ”

“ Oskey-wow-wow
Skinney-wow-wow,
Illinois, Illinois, *wow!* ”

The captain had begun in a sort of hoarse whisper, but the last “ *wow!* ” rang out through the woods with a vigor that carried one back to college campus and gridiron.

“ That yell could win a feetsball game,” laughed the Frenchman, in his best English.
“ Pass, American! ”

CHAPTER IX

A PAIR OF SOCKS

Two boys and a man plodded forward into the night, their machine, for safety's sake, left behind with the now friendly French captain. They had covered at least ten of the intervening fifteen miles, they figured, and the hour was near midnight. They were tired, hungry and cross. When Jerry twisted his ankle at the bottom of a little ravine it seemed the last touch needed to make their misery complete. He limped on behind the others, his mind busy with discontented, homesick thoughts. War certainly was all General Sherman had said of it.

Ahead of them, at the turn of the road, which by now had degenerated into the merest foot-path, a light beamed mistily from curtained windows, and the low hum of voices came through the partly open door. Even at this distance it was apparent that the voices were French, so without fear the tired wayfarers drew up to the door. They knocked.

“*Entrez!*” called a heavy voice. The low hum ceased abruptly. Captain Ring, followed by the two boys, pushed the door wide open and walked in—to be confronted by a dozen men with drawn revolvers. At sight of the unarmed three the men dropped their revolvers back into their holsters and a hearty laugh cleared the tension of the moment.

“You will pardon our suspicion, gentlemen,” said a big blond fellow, with a beard that covered the whole lower part of his face, “but it is not the first time our little meetings have been interrupted and revolvers have often been quite the fashion.”

He spoke in English, having recognized the nationality of the newcomers. There was just the slightest suspicion of a foreign touch to his pronunciation; they afterward learned that he had been educated in England.

“We are three Americans,” answered Captain Dan by way of introduction. “I am Captain Ring of the American Expeditionary Force, and this is my nephew and his chum. We have permission to visit the front. Here are our passports if you care to examine them.”

“If Monsieur will do me that honor,” replied the blond man. “I am Colonel Vaux,” he continued as he scrutinized the papers, initialing them without the slightest hesitation. “We are here to discuss means of successfully stopping the raiding parties that the boches are constantly sending behind our lines through this marshy country. If you wish to *see* the fighting front, you should have gone farther to the north.”

“We missed our way,” explained Captain Ring.

“There is no front here. The lines are from four to ten miles apart on account of the boggy ground. There is no chance to hold it. Just now we control it, but the minute the Germans are willing to pay the price we shall be very willing to give it up. I see Captain Henri-court viséed your passports—his post is the beginning of our permanent trenches. Two weeks ago we advanced and drove the boches out of the marshes—they still hold the hills beyond. If we could get enough men over this soft ground we should soon drive them from the heights.”

“ And in the meanwhile — ”

“ In the meanwhile our outposts are raided every night. At any moment — ”

The moment was at hand. A weird cry shrilled through the night. A patter of rifle shots broke the stillness. There came a rush of hurrying feet, a shouted command. A fight was in progress less than two hundred yards away.

“ Quick,” whispered Vaux to Captain Ring “ Have you the nerve — and the boys? I have a plan.”

“ I’m game,” answered the American grimly. “ What is it? ”

“ This place is a blind. It has double walls. Our outpost is small out yonder. They will be outnumbered. Next they will attack the house here. The door is open. Let it remain so. They will come in — if they see you and the two boys alone. You will surrender, quietly. They will all come in — they will hope for plunder. When they are all in, you will let them know we have them — what you say? — covered? Yes, of course there is the risk — ”

“ Never mind that.”

“ They may not *ask* you to surrender. The boches often shoot first and ask later. But it is a sport for gods to take such a chance, yes? Ah, I have it. The boys will go. You and I will remain.”

“ Get out — quick! ” whispered Jerry. “ The boys will remain. *Get!* ”

Colonel Vaux got. There was barely a second to spare as he followed the rest out of the room. The next instant a score of men crowded into the doorway. They were all shapes and sizes, Jerry decided as he looked over the motley group, from sixteen-year-old boys to tottering grandfathers. The officer at their head was a fine specimen of manhood; the rest were ill-fed and poorly clothed. They lacked spirit. If Jerry had not been scared half out of his wits himself, he would have said the whole crew was frightened.

“ Search them,” ordered the officer. A dozen men sprang forward to do his bidding, stepping back just as spryly when Captain Ring suddenly rose to his feet.

“ Cowards! ” screamed the officer, using the butt of his revolver on the man who happened

to be nearest him. "Hold up your hands," he ordered Captain Ring.

The captain, who understood German perfectly, shrugged his shoulders to indicate that he did not comprehend.

"Put up your hands then," repeated the man, this time in English. "I guess you understand that, you swine of a Yankee."

"Maybe I do," answered the captain, coolly. "And maybe you'll understand me when I tell you that back of this wall are men lying with rifles trained on your crew, and most of them are aimed at you."

"I have played poker with Americans," sneered the officer, "and taken their money. I don't bluff."

"All right, what have you got? I have a full house. Take a good look."

The officer looked.

In fact, he looked straight into the muzzle of a rifle. Still he scoffed: "If you had men behind those rifles, you wouldn't be out here alone."

A gun clicked as it was cocked; the clicks passed down the wall and all around the room.

"It was a trap," said the Yankee; "I was the bait."

"Oh, indeed," answered the German easily. "Perhaps you have heard of a trap within a trap. You've showed me your cards. Step to the door and I'll show you mine."

Unthinkingly, Captain Ring obeyed, and curiously the two boys crowded close behind him. The German was just a pace in their rear. Then something happened. A second later, Jerry, Tod and Captain Ring disentangled themselves from the heap into which the rush of the German had thrown them. They thought he had made good his escape, but he had stopped a dozen feet away, his revolver seeming to cover them all three.

"Run," he commanded. "I'm going to carry off the bait, even if the trap was sprung. Straight ahead of me—my pistol carries two bullets apiece for you, don't forget that."

There was nothing to do but to obey, so straight down the narrow roadway they marched at a trot, the little house lost completely to view before they had been gone a minute. They had been trapped, indeed!

Not a word was spoken as they tramped along, save the curt commands of their captor. Unerringly he threaded his way along a path that grew fainter and fainter, till it seemed to merge into the gray of the night. On each side of them the tangled vines and tall grass of a swamp stretched into the dark.

Captives!

The rest of that night was just one nightmare after another. After a half hour of blind stumbling along they ran into another raiding party of gray-clad Germans. Escorted by these the three passed through the German lines on the brow of a low ridge of hills, the same they had seen earlier in the day. Here they were taken into a spacious dugout where a disagreeable individual, at this time in his underwear and a scull cap, asked them a thousand questions. Captain Ring answered civilly enough, though there was every reason for losing his temper. The man doubted everything that was said, asked the same question over and over again in a different form, and did his best both to catch the captain in a lie and to wring information from him of real value. A dozen times

he was about to give up in disgust, but once more he would come back to the attack with renewed vigor and coarseness.

From insult he proceeded to abuse. He had Captain Ring's hands tied behind his back and then, a few inches from the poor man's face, he gave vent to the foulest curses. When he finally learned that the captain was an American, he struck him across the face with the flat of his hand. Then and then only did Captain Ring lose his temper.

"Some day an American—I hope I may be the one—will avenge that insult. I thank God all Germans are not like you. There are gentlemen among you, but on account of those like you, my country has come into this fight. They are going to win it, for the sake of the freedom of the world, and for the good of those Germans who suffer from you and your like. I have answered my last question. Go change your underwear; it smells of the sty."

After that they were bundled off into a hole in the ground that reeked to high heaven with a thousand odors of rotted food and close-herded humanity. A half hour of it found both

boys sick and trembling with nausea; Uncle Dan sat in stoic silence and brooded.

“What have we in the way of weapons?” he roused himself finally and asked.

The boys only groaned.

“That fellow who examined us was an underling. It won’t be long before they send for us and one of the higher-ups is given a whack at us. That will be about our last chance at escape. If they send one guard for us — ”

“They’ll send a dozen,” moaned Tod dispiritedly.

“Not likely more than two,” answered the captain, “as they probably will haul us out one at a time, to see if our tales hang together. They’ve got my story, so it’s likely to be one of you two. Do you suppose you can untie me with your teeth?”

They had all been tied up before being pushed into their damp dungeon and now the pain in their swollen wrists was almost past bearing. The captain had been tied up longest, and all feeling had gone out of his hands. First Jerry and then Tod and then turn about they gnawed at the tough ropes. It was a half hour at least

before the first strand was severed. But after that it was easier. They tugged and chewed; a knot wrenched open. A few minutes more of frantic work—Jerry was gnawing at the time—and Uncle Dan was free. He immediately sprang to his feet.

It was but an instant's work for him to release the two boys. They chafed their bruised wrists, almost screaming out with the agony of returning circulation.

"Now as to weapons," began Uncle Dan, as soon as they were all ready to discuss affairs with some degree of calmness. "Dig me off a couple of handfuls of clay—good, solid clay—from the walls, while I take off my shoes. Lively now."

Wonderingly the boys obeyed. The captain removed his shoes, then his socks. Rapidly he began packing the damp soil into the one sock, while Jerry, as soon as he caught the idea, filled the other.

"A sandbag!" exclaimed Tod.

"A good heavy one," chuckled Jerry, smacking his against the thick of his leg. "Silent and sure."

"Guess I'd better make me one—" began Tod, but Uncle Dan interrupted him.

"No, two will be enough, because we won't dare try it if there are more than two of the guards. Now you two go on back to your groaning—yes, I mean just that. If the fellow they try to take first can force himself to vomit at the right instant it would help a lot. Be sure to keep your hands behind your backs, and don't make the break until I give the signal—a cough. Then act like Yankee lightning. Best be quiet now—and wait."

An hour passed, then another. Jerry more than once caught himself nodding and pulled himself back to wakefulness with a jerk. He began to fancy that he heard shuffling footsteps approaching the rough door. When real footsteps finally did sound out in the passageway he was sure they were still fancy. But when the door flung open with a crash and two soldiers, each carrying a rifle with a bayonet fixed, came into the cavelike room, he made sure he was wide awake. He wondered whether he or Tod would be taken—or both. He held the sock.

Then he looked past the two soldiers, and saw a third, a sentinel perhaps, standing just outside the door. Had Uncle Dan seen too, he wondered. If he had, would he still make the attempt?

The thoughts flashed quickly through his brain in the half second that the soldiers took in crossing the room with their plodding steps. Ah, it was Tod they were after. When would Uncle Dan give the signal? They were stooping over Tod, who was groaning most dismally and realistically.

"*Steh' auf!*" commanded the one nearest Jerry, giving Tod's shoulder a jab with the butt end of his gun.

"*Schnell!*" exclaimed the other, but glancing toward Jerry as he spoke. The boy clutched his clay-bag grimly under his back, wondering vaguely if he could leap the ten intervening feet before the man could up-end his rifle and spit him through the stomach. The stomach, Jerry reflected, was the meanest place in the world to be spitted.

Uncle Dan groaned and shifted his position. The two straightened up and peered sharply

into that corner of the room. Satisfied, they turned back to Tod, who had finally succeeded in wrenching himself, to the great disgust of the soldiers. However, he had risen and was tottering across the floor. He stumbled and would have fallen—the men reached out and caught him. A rifle clattered to the floor.

“ Herumph! ”

Jerry was dimly conscious that a dark mass had dislocated itself from the corner and catapulted itself across the room. Thud!—a dull, sickening sound. Just then, Jerry too struck out, flinching as the blow landed full on the temple of the man nearest him.

He caught up the rifle that had fallen an instant before. Before the others knew what he was doing he was out in the passageway. The sentry had just turned, alarmed perhaps by the sound of the scuffling. For just a fraction of time Jerry hesitated. The steel of his own bayonet gleamed wickedly in the light of the lantern set in the wall just beyond. He shuddered as he pictured the awful feel of that knife-point tearing through human flesh. Then he drew back.

“*Gieb ein,*” he commanded, trusting that his memory had supplied the right words.

“*Kamerad!*” exclaimed the fellow, dropping his gun and throwing up his hands, palms out.

“Get in there,” Jerry ordered, forgetting his German, but the man understood the gesture well enough. He fairly scrambled through the doorway, hastened somewhat by a mischievous prod of the bayonet.

“Here’s the other one,” Jerry announced, following his captive in. “Let’s tie them up as fast as fingers will let us. In about three minutes they’re going to send someone else down here to find out what’s keeping this precious lot.”

It took mighty few seconds to do the job, especially since all they wanted was a half-minute’s start. A gag was harder to fashion, but only one was needed; the two who had been “socked” lay still enough.

A half minute more passed; it was a half minute too much. In the passageway sounded the tramp of feet, many of them.

“Quick!” called Uncle Dan guardedly. “Follow me.”

They dashed through the doorway — then came to a full halt.

At the end of the passage, pressing through the narrow door, rushed a dozen shouting German soldiers!

CHAPTER X

ACROSS NO MAN'S LAND

There was no other way out, the three saw that at a glance. For one questioning second Captain Ring looked at the two boys and they stared back at him, more than half frightened, if the truth be confessed. Then:

“It’s the only thing to do. Up and at ’em, boys!”

Setting both example and pace, Uncle Dan began pumping his rifle as fast as he could work it, yelling like a wild Indian at the same time, and slashing straight at the oncoming Germans. One of them fell—another. By this time Jerry and Tod were close behind. Jerry had caught up the sentry’s rifle from where it fell; in running the scant ten yards he had emptied its magazine, with what effect he did not know, for the Germans were thoroughly scared. More fell over the rest in their efforts to get out of range than fell from the bullets.

But the result was the same. Aside from a

thin volley at the very start of the wild charge, they did not fire many shots. By the time the racing three reached the first fallen soldier, the way was clear. Fortunately, this door opened into a square ante-room sort of affair, with one door opening into the free air. Cautioning the boys to silence, Uncle Dan led the way out.

It was dark, a soft clinging sort of blackness with scarcely a star showing. At a dozen feet one simply melted into the gloom. "Keep close behind," warned the captain, "and move as fast as you can without making a sound."

It was a breathless five minutes. Strangely enough, no general alarm was sounded in that time, and the fugitives reached the first-line trench without a challenge. Just back of it they halted.

"Now it'll have to be every man for himself," whispered Uncle Dan. Try to keep within sight of each other, but not too close. See that bunch of blacker-than-black yon—it must be a clump of trees. It's probably guarded. We'll aim to meet again at a spot a hundred long steps beyond it and the same distance to the right. Spread out now, ten feet

apart, and we'll go over the top! Go!"

They went. Luck was with them. The trenches were clear of all save a sentry who paced the parapet on the far side, and a corporal's guard dimly seen in the light of a smoldering camp fire. The rush took them down into the trench, and they had scrambled well up the opposite edge before either the sentry or the men below were aware that anything out of the ordinary was happening. Another leap took them over the loose earth and now they were running free over the sloping hillside. A rifle stabbed the night with a burst of flame, and Jerry felt a keen jab of pain in his left side, but he kept on running. His first thought was that he had been shot, but as the pain stopped in a little while he concluded that he was merely out of training and had developed "side-ache."

After the first few seconds he lost sight of his companions, and before long he could not even locate them by the sound of their running. However, he consoled himself with the thought that the dark patch ahead was still in sight and was rapidly drawing nearer.

And then, all of a sudden, a glare of light flashed up just ahead of him; the Germans had shot out one of their illuminating rockets. In its blinding rays he could see Captain Ring just ahead of him; he had stopped short, the startled look on his face almost comical in its vividness. Tod was still farther ahead and to the right. A shot rang out, a dozen of them together. Jerry saw Tod stumble, almost fall, then catch himself and run forward a dozen steps. There he pitched headlong and lay still.

“Drop!” shouted Captain Ring. “Down on your face, Jerry, and dig in.” He flopped suddenly out of sight.

A low boom sounded far off ahead of them, to be answered, a second later, by a terrific explosion behind them. “Great heavens!” thought the boy, “are they going after us with cannon?”

He burrowed and crawled his way close beside his uncle, who reprimanded him sharply. “You shouldn’t have done that. They can spot you the minute you start moving.”

Boom! Another fearful upheaval rent the air. It was closer to them this time but still behind.

“ They must be crazy,” ventured Jerry. “ A machine gun would pick us off in half the time one of those big fellows would blow us up.”

His uncle stared at him, a slow grin, ghastly in the greenish light, wrinkling up his face. “ Those cannon aren’t aimed at us, boy. They’re French cannon. They’re shooting at that light. They think they have located the Germans. If that confounded rocket would just burn out we’d move along before our friends find our range and blow us into smithereens.”

“ I’ve heard those rockets burn as long as ten minutes.”

“ Yep. And it won’t take those French gunners ten minutes to locate us. We’ll have to chance it. Got your wind back? ”

“ Yes — but how about Tod? We can’t leave him.”

“ Who said anything about that. You go ahead; I’ll take care of your chum. Angle to the left—it makes you less of a target. Scoot! ”

Again they raced across the turfy field, nipped along by bullets that zipped all about them. Jerry saw that Uncle Dan had caught up a

limp body and flung it across his shoulders; it was about that time he was conscious of another stinging, stabbing sensation in his shoulder.

And then, as suddenly as it had flared up, the light blotted out. Jerry stumbled, almost fell, so unexpected was the blackness of everything. For an instant he thought he had gone blind. But he was quickly set right by the sight of a dull glow of light ahead and to the left of them, accompanied by a low, growling boom, a screech overhead and then a rending, overwhelming concussion that threw him flat to the ground and left him gasping for breath amid a tornado of destruction.

In a daze he heard his name called. He struggled to his feet, crying, sobbing hysterically, clutching convulsively at a hand that suddenly met his own. "Thank God!" said Uncle Dan. "I thought it had got you."

"Pretty nigh. But where's Tod?"

"Here — and walking," answered a weak voice. "I just *thought* I was killed. A bullet came along and creased me. I'm a bit shaky, but better'n a dead German yet."

"All right, boys, let's mosey along. Maybe

the next five-incher won't be so considerate."

"*Five inch!*" exclaimed Jerry, but beginning to run. "I thought it was a five-footer."

After a bit they slowed down to a walk, and it was almost at a snail's pace that they entered a French outpost something like three hours later. Day was breaking, which was fortunate, for the last few miles lay amidst tiny lakes and streams and mud marshes almost impassable. The sentry who saw them coming almost stared his eyes out. Then:

"The Americans!" he shouted at the top of his voice and soldiers came swarming out over the trench and almost carried the three weary fugitives in to where warmth and food awaited them. It was only after they had slumped down, in the great camp-made chairs, that they realized how utterly worn out they were.

After he had sat there a moment, Jerry found that he could not get up again. "Stiff?" asked Uncle Dan, sympathetically.

"Must be—my side seems to hurt me, and my shoulder. I think it's bleeding both places."

"I expect the same thing's the matter with

you as ails my leg. The Germans potted me when we made our dash—just as I was straightening up with Tod.”

“You’re a hero, Uncle Dan. A bloomin’, dirty, disreputable hero. All that way with a bullet in your leg, and not a word about it. I’ve been whimpering about my side-ache every step of the way.”

“Side-ache? Huh. You’ve got a punctured tire—two of them. The minute it began to get light I saw the blood oozing out, but figured we’d better not stop short of medical attention. One of the lads who helped us in chased right off after a doctor. I guess we know where we’ll spend our next week or so—in hospital.”

Jerry protested, but the captain was right. Tod’s scalp wound was nothing at all, once a clean dressing had been wound around his cranium, but the ball had splintered off a bit of bone in the captain’s leg, and Jerry’s shoulder showed a clean hole through the muscle just above the collar bone, while the other had come in from the side, just above his hip, and emerged directly below the navel.

However, it was not so bad, as they were

carried by ambulance back to the American camp — Camp Nine — and there allowed to move about as freely as their wounds would permit. The captain did his moving on crutches, but he was the most cheerful of the three; Jerry and Tod fretted every moment at the enforced delay in their plans.

Moreover, along toward the end of their second week, when Tod had discarded his head-dress and Jerry was clamoring to take off his bandages, disquieting rumors began to come in. A whole French company had been wiped out through some mysterious explosion. An aeroplane had most successfully bombed a section of trenches, and the Germans had swarmed in, compelling a general retirement over a front of nearly five miles. Aeroplane attacks in the sector where the three had staged their escapade had compelled the giving up of the whole marsh region.

Of course both boys, compelled to inactivity, were ready to jump at any wild conclusion: Jerry was positive that the Germans had at last put the Fulton Aeroplane into operation. But Tod scouted his belief. “The only dif-

ference between these raids and others that have come before, so far as the reports go, is that the machines were flying a little higher."

Captain Ring appeared about to say something at this, but refrained.

"You watch and see," predicted Jerry.

Next day his promise seemed verified. The *Paris Temps* published a long article by a leading aeronautic expert, which wound up by saying:

"Make no doubt of it, the new aeroplane that is causing such consternation in high military circles, and is fast turning the front line trenches into a shambles, is some recent invention. Its appearance marks the beginning of a new epoch in the war. That epoch dawns dark and forbidding for the allied arms. The morale of our soldiers exposed to its ravages is not broken, but there is a strong feeling of uneasiness everywhere apparent. None of our machines are able to fly so high, and the accuracy with which explosives are dropped from unprecedented elevations is diabolical beyond belief. Out of seven bombs dropped by one machine near Plissy Hill, six fell within a

circle of fifty feet, and all struck their objective — a group of munitions buildings.”

It was Captain Ring who found the article and brought it to the boys. After they had each read it he said gravely:

“It is what I feared — and what Jerry predicted. That is the Fulton Aeroplane. What the experts have not guessed is the fact that the machine is practically stationary when the bombs are dropped. And what you two do not know about Tod’s father’s invention is the device he perfected after Uncle Sam took over the invention — a contraption that adds an easy three thousand feet to the height a pilot can attain. With the Fulton Aeroplane as it was, German superiority in the air was established until our government could get similar machines into flight. But without Mr. Fulton they could never hope to equal the machines that are hurling tons of death and destruction out yonder.”

“I know what I’m going to do,” Jerry announced. “I’m going to volunteer for the air service. I’m going to capture one of those machines, and with it as a model we’ll soon

clean up on those Germans. I've got a grudge against them—three grudges. One on Mr. Fulton's account and two on my own."

"But your father—"

"Has given his consent to my enlistment. He didn't specify which branch I should go into. Take me along next time you go over to the camp, Uncle Dan, will you?"

"But it might be months and months before you get to fly. You have to learn to manage a machine—go to school—"

"I'll make short work of that. Both Tod and I have already taken up Mr. Fulton's first flyer—"

"I'll see what I can do, Jerry, but I make no promises. But you want to remember that it will put a stop to your being free to go in case any other clew should come to light."

"I've made up my mind that Tod's father is across the trenches, over there in Germany. The sooner we win this war, the sooner he'll be free. And nothing but the Fulton Aeroplane is going to win it."

"Hum!" said Captain Ring.

It was two or three days later, after Uncle

Dan had laid aside his crutches, though he still limped a bit, that he came up to Jerry and announced:

“ Well, boy, I’ve been called. They don’t know about my leg, and I could wait another week, but I’m anxious to get into it. Still want to go along, do you? ”

“ Sure do.”

“ Suppose I get them to sign you up as an observer—you could go along with me, then, and wouldn’t have to spend so much time in school. And at that I fancy you’d get to fly your own machine as soon as you would the other way. What say? ”

“ What could I say but yes? How about Tod? He’s been as mum as a clam to me ever since I spoke of going up.”

“ To me, too. Do you suppose he’ll go back to the States? ”

“ We’ll have to ask him, I guess.”

Later in the day Jerry approached Tod. “ I say, old man, what’s your plan? Uncle Dan’s been ordered to report for duty, and I’m going with him. He thinks he can work me in as his observer. Don’t some of these machines

carry three — a bomb-dropper, too? Maybe you could — ”

“ I’m going to have my own machine — ”

“ You’re going in too! ” excitedly.

“ There’s nothing else for me to do — with you in with Uncle Dan, it looks kind of as if I was left out in the cold. So I’ve asked for a chance to show them I can run one — ”

“ You have! ” Jerry looked at a new chum. Easy-going Tod seemed to have grown up all in a minute. “ Put her there! Let’s see who’ll be the first one to bring down a German pilot with one of your dad’s machines. I’m going to tell Uncle Dan there’s nothing doing on the observer stunt. It’s pilot or nothing for me! ”

“ And we’ll make it, ” promised Tod. “ We’ve got a big card to play, remember that. We’re the only ones, not even excepting your Uncle Dan, who knows how to run the Fulton Aeroplane! ”

“ Sure! ” Then thoughtfully: “ That’d be fine if we just had a few of them to fly — but the Germans have got the whole visible supply cornered just at present. ”

“ You bet—that’s true. But put this in your pipe and smoke it. Dad used to say there never was a destructive invention but that a counter invention was thought out in short order.”

“ Yes—by inventors, not by two kids,” answered Jerry scornfully.

“ In this case, the same man who made the invention schemed out the way to beat it. He told one secret to Captain Ring. He told this one to me! ”

CHAPTER XI

A DOUBLE FALL

The next week or so was the busiest time those two boys ever put in. The rigid training they were put through was enough in itself, but after that was over they pored over books until their eyes smarted. They were trying to squeeze what should have been six months' training into as many days. Thanks to their previous experience, they were able to do it, after a fashion. At the end of that time they declared themselves ready to take their first lesson in actual flying, and, more surprising still, had obtained the consent of the instructors to attempt it. They fancied that this was due to a talk with the head of the aviation corps, in which they told him much, and hinted darkly at more, of their knowledge of the new German aeroplane. As a matter of fact, it was largely due to the good offices of Captain Ring.

He had already made several flights on offi-

cial business; the boys learned that he had been piloting his own machine for several months before the entrance of America into the war.

The big day came when they were to be allowed to go up. The machine chosen was a Curtiss biplane of the old type, a slow, unwieldy craft but correspondingly safe. It carried a pilot and one passenger, in this case an experienced pilot, who could reach over and grab the levers in case anything went wrong. To Jerry's great disappointment, Tod was chosen to go up first.

He handled the mechanism like a professional, left the ground easily and immediately began climbing. At about five hundred feet he brought the machine to even keel and circled about, dipping, turning about at short angles, volplaning. After fifteen minutes of this he dropped down at a slant so steep that it drew gasps from the spectators, most of whom were themselves students, but he skimmed to earth as lightly as a swallow.

Jerry's heart ached with pure envy when he heard the attendant instructor step out and

slap Tod on the shoulder. "You'll do. As neat a piece of flying as I've ever seen. We'll have you teaching the youngsters here within the week."

"He'll be chasing Fritz back over the line long before that," laughed the chief, coming up and shaking Tod's hand.

Still, Jerry was pleased when the same instructor came over to take his place for the second flight. Now, said Jerry to himself, he'd show this chap some real flying; he'd know he was up in an airship and not riding a rocking chair.

Brrsipp! they had parted company with mother earth. Like a streak they shot skyward. So steep was the slant, it looked almost as if they would tip over backwards.

"Easy there, boy!" yelled the "passenger."

"Don't worry, I've got her by the nose," shrieked Pilot Jerry. "Just sit tight—and don't worry."

The roar of the motor was almost deafening, and the air stung their faces as, once pointed straight ahead, Jerry let her out to the last notch. Round and round the aviation field they coursed, each circle growing less, till they

looked to the anxious watchers below like a giant top spinning there in mid-air. Then up again, till they were only a speck against the clear sky. Jerry shut off the power. In an ever-widening circle he volplaned. It took his breath away, and his eyes were blurred, but he kept his nerve. A hundred feet from the ground he threw the motor in once more, tipped her up just enough to gentle her for the final plunge, and then, within fifty feet of the waiting group, shut off the power and landed her neatly and with hardly a jar. Ten feet from where Captain Ring stood, a gratified smile on his face, the machine came to a stop. Jerry sprang out, his eyes fairly snapping with triumph and excitement.

“You young daredevil, you!” cried his passenger. “There’s only one thing I wouldn’t rather do than ride with you: that’s be chased by you.”

“Jerusha, Jerry!” exclaimed Tod, rushing up and shaking his chum’s hand, “you sure had my heart in my mouth about forty times. Bet you I bit a chunk out of it.”

That settled it. There was no denying the

two boys after that. Nor was there any disposition to. At this stage of the game, experienced aviators were scarce as hen's teeth, at the American camp, and both Jerry and Tod promised to develop into valuable air scouts. They were keen to be masters of their own sky-boats, but save for a few biplanes of obsolete type, there were none forthcoming, and these were all needed in school service. However, the boys had their fill of flying, for hardly a day passed that they were not called to assist in breaking in the other young aspirants.

In the meanwhile the fame of the dreaded new German machine was spreading. New stories came in each day, some of them undoubtedly only exaggerations of earlier reports. But there could be no doubt that the Teutons were rapidly regaining the mastery of the air; neither the French nor the British had been able to make infantry attacks for a week past — the Germans had put out their "eyes."

Not only that, but there was a feeling that an extensive advance was being planned by the forces of the Crown Prince. Every day German aeroplanes flew high over the Allied lines,

scouting out weak spots, watching movements of troops, photographing trench lines, gun positions, ammunition depots. No anti aircraft guns could reach them, and they rode secure from the lower flying French and British craft.

So far none of these new aeroplanes had appeared over the American camp, to the great disappointment of Tod and Jerry, who were keen for a sight of what they were now finally convinced must be the Fulton Aeroplane.

But one fair Monday morning all this was changed. At ten o'clock a message came from Camp Seventeen, ten miles north and east of them, that a German biplane had been observed bearing toward Camp Nine, flying high against the clear sky. That course would carry it a bit east of the aviation field. Tod and Jerry begged permission to take the old Curtiss up and watch for the invader, promising to return to camp the minute it was sighted and its course determined.

Tod reached the pilot's seat first and would not budge, so Jerry had to be satisfied with the observation post. He had brought with him a rifle and cartridge belt, as well as a

pair of binoculars, so he did not feel himself the least important part of the expedition as he strapped himself in. A lurch and they were off, soaring high into the calm air. Straight cast they headed, going at capacity—thirty-five miles an hour. After they had made perhaps five miles they slowed down, but Tod continued to climb.

“He may be flying low along here,” he shouted; “it’s all open country, you know. You may get a shot at him before we turn tail and run.”

Jerry nodded emphatically. “Give me the shot,” he yelled, “and we won’t have to turn tail.”

Which, it turned out, was exactly what happened. But not the way Jerry meant it.

They were up about three thousand feet, when they struck a heavy wind that was blowing due north. It caught them suddenly, at the end of a long swing around, and for an instant it took all of Tod’s ability to keep them right side up. The wind caught the outer plane and almost buckled it. One of the wires parted with a snap that sounded like a pistol shot.

Fortunately, it was merely a stay wire and would not bother them in normal flying.

They might have turned back to camp then, as common sense told them they should, but at that instant Jerry caught sight of a speck in the sky, apparently a couple of miles away. He immediately decided that it was the expected aeroplane. In a very few minutes they made sure it was only a soaring buzzard, but by that time they had regained their confidence and made up their minds to stick it out.

They had dropped to a little over a thousand feet by this time, and the motor was barely spinning, so that conversation was not difficult. They were deep in an animated discussion of Captain Ring's ability as a pilot—he had done some circus stunts with the Curtiss the day before—when *ping!* another stay wire parted just above Jerry's head. The long end caught him a smart blow across the cheek and drew blood.

"Gracious!" he exclaimed. "I guess maybe we'd better go down. Looks as if the old kite was going to part company with itself."

"I think that's the wire I noticed yesterday

and was going to change. There was a badly rusted spot in it."

Thwack! something struck the motor with a sort of flattened-out impact.

"Jerusha!" exclaimed Tod. "What was that?"

"There's a hole in our top plane, just above the motor—by Jove, there's another right above where that wire broke!—what—"

"Pshaw! We're nincompoops, that's what. That chap caught us napping. He's above us there somewhere popping away at us at his own sweet pleasure. I'd better open her up or he'll get us next time."

Ping—*we-e-ee!* a bullet struck the propeller blade and a splinter flashed past Jerry's head.

"Look above and see if you can see him," shouted Tod above the roar of the motor, now at top speed. "I'll tip her up a bit so you get a better sweep."

Jerry looked aloft, but his eyes could detect nothing. He tried the glasses, but with no better result.

"Nothing there!" he yelled. "That must have been hail."



Out of the sky, directly in front of them, but from an unbelievable height, a huge biplane coursed directly toward them.

Tod said nothing. Hail out of a clear sky? That machine was up above—miles above—and painted pale blue, so that it melted into the tint of the sky.

A bullet tore a long gash in their left plane, out near the end. Another struck the elevating rudder an instant later. The enemy might be invisible, but there was something mighty realistic about his marksmanship.

Tod tried dodging about in short circles, Jerry all the time keeping a sharp lookout. Neither boy wished to descend, but it was evident that the unequal battle could not long be maintained. A chance shot might any second send them plunging to earth and sure death.

But the passing moments gave them renewed confidence. "I guess he's decided we weren't worth his time, and he's gone on," yelled Jerry in Tod's ear.

Tod merely nodded. He needed all his energy for handling the machine.

And then it happened. Out of the sky, directly in front of them, but from an unbelievable height, a monster biplane coursed directly toward them. It must have been four miles away when

Jerry first sighted it through the binoculars. At least half of those miles were in height. At terrific speed it neared them, till its sky-blue planes were easily visible to Tod, who veered his machine as quickly as he could and began a zigzag flight toward the ground and camp.

The aeroplane above altered its course; there could be no doubt it was following them, and there was still less doubt that they would soon be overtaken. The old Curtiss wobbled uncertainly; her best speed was pitifully scant. Now the biplane above was barely two miles away—now a mile, and almost directly over them. The zip and ping of bullets sounded close to their ears as the leaden hail whizzed past.

Tod took a sharp tack into the north. He had struck a strata of moving air—it would add a mile or so to their speed. *Thwack!* the motor was struck again. It missed fire for a dizzying instant, but picked up its snorting hum again. “Jerusha!” exclaimed Tod, half in fear and half in relief. Sweat was standing out on his forehead. Jerry felt a clammy sensation in what might in normal times have been

the pit of his stomach. Now it seemed to be right under the root of his tongue.

The pursuing machine was now less than a mile away, and steadily dropping. A wide circle had taken it off to the south, but the end of the swing would bring it almost even with the boys.

"I'm going to swing back," shouted Tod. "It's our only chance. They've shut off their motor; they're volplaning down to catch us—they know we haven't got the speed to pull away." He had shut off the motor himself as he talked. "I'm going up. I'll give you that shot at her that you asked for." His face was white and set, but grimly determined. "If we can get above them, and I get the chance, I'll ram them!"

The shaky feeling left Jerry. He caught up the rifle out of its holster. He laid a clip of cartridges in readiness when the magazine should be exhausted. Yankee grit was in the mastery once more.

Tod shifted his levers; he threw the motor in. The other machine was now less than half a mile away, its three occupants easily visible

to the naked eye. It was at their own level when Tod started his climb. Before the others had guessed his intention, he had climbed five hundred feet. Here there was little advantage for the big aeroplane — on the straightaway it was two to one at least.

“They’ll follow us up,” yelled Tod. “As soon as they’ve got a good start, I’m going to turn on them. They’ll have to step lively if they get out of my way. If you don’t pot them, I will!”

His eyes were blazing with excitement. Jerry was in little better case; his hands shook so he could hardly hold his rifle. He had turned halfway about, so that he could follow the movements of their pursuers. “They’re coming up,” he exclaimed, mostly to himself, for Tod was past listening. “I believe I’ll take a shot at them.”

But he did not. Just then Tod, after a hasty glance over his shoulder, warped his left plane and swung about in a sharp curve that drew a gasp from Jerry. The sight that met his eyes as they drew out on a straight course again drew another gasp, one that was choked off in

the middle. The biggest biplane he had ever seen, with armored hood and spreading blue planes — every detail was blue — was coming full at them, like some monster animal. Only the heads of the occupants were visible — Jerry rested the end of his rifle on the rod that held him from falling out.

Taking careful sight, he pulled trigger — once, twice, three times. A qualmish feeling came over him as he did it, this first calm-minded shooting at a fellow human being numbed him with a kind of horror. But when he looked, after the first three shots, and saw the big machine coming at them in unheeding scorn, a cold fury possessed him. He emptied the magazine as fast as fingers could pull trigger, chagrined to find when the last cartridge had been exploded, that he had scored a miss for every shell.

He reloaded as quickly as he could, and was about to begin firing again, when a queer fancy entered his excited brain. The two machines were now less than three hundred yards apart, their own machine coming down with tremendous speed. He looked at Tod; the set expression

of his chum's face was almost terrifying. His eyes seemed to stand out of his face; his lips were parted in an unlaughing grin. Jerry wanted to laugh — or cry, he hardly knew which. Two hundred yards now! Jerry seemed to hear a voice whispering into his brain: "Don't shoot — till you see the whites of their eyes!"

"I won't!" he muttered to himself, conscious at that instant that the occupants of the approaching machine had opened fire, and that a burning, stinging something had nipped his left arm. He tried to raise it — and could not.

"Shoot!" cried Tod hoarsely. "For God's sake, Jerry, shoot!"

Jerry waited.

A hundred yards now. Another half instant —

Jerry dared not take his eyes from the approaching machine, but he knew that the mirthless grin still distorted Tod's face. He knew that the hands gripping the levers were numbed — that the same fear that gripped his heart and smothered its beating was clutching at his chum.

Another rending pain jabbed his shoulder; he hardly noticed it. A cry from Tod drew his

eyes an instant. A splotch of red seemed to have leaped to the boys' throat; he slumped back in his seat, still grasping the levers but unconscious.

Another second and the big machine below would veer and pass over or under them.

A wild fury of determination seized Jerry. Things were swimming before his eyes, but at the end of a lane of white light closed in by black he saw that awful spectre. Three black dots showed along the rim of the hood. The one in the center — Jerry held the sight on it. Now!

He pulled the trigger. Almost delirious, he fancied that dot gone. The machine before him lurched — it was thirty yards away — the two aeroplanes would crash together in another half instant unless something were done.

There was no one to do it!

Jerry's shot had laid out the pilot.

A breathless second. Then crash! A thousand lights flashed in Jerry's brain, then all went out. He realized that he was hurt — falling — dying, he was sure. Then all went black before him.

CHAPTER XII

THE "VAMPIRE" DOES IT

Ordinarily, a fall of more than five hundred feet, in an aeroplane, can have but one result for the unlucky aeronaut: instant death. And that was what happened to two of those in the German plane. The pilot was not killed, though shot through the head by Jerry and fearfully crushed beneath the wreckage of his machine. Neither was Tod, shot through the neck and unconscious as the Curtiss plunged earthward. Neither was Jerry, though it was a miracle of chance that saved the two boys.

The two machines had come together there in mid-air with sufficient force to lock them tight. The big plane was underneath and thus held together they fell, not over and over as one might expect, but like a dead weight. At the last, the heavier machine hung directly underneath, like a pendulum. It struck the ground tail down, buried itself for three feet. Through it all the Curtiss held, nose down, jammed far

into the fore-structure of the German plane.

And so it was that Jerry and Tod, strapped in, were not thrown to the ground but hung there high in air. The other pilot, too, had been strapped in, but his two companions were found, fifty feet away, mangled out of all recognition.

Even so, the three survivors might have perished in short order, for the flames broke out almost immediately, had it not been for the timely arrival of a corporal's guard of French soldiers. They had witnessed the fight and fall, and were on hand before the first explosion told that the gasoline tanks had ignited. The three unconscious forms were cut loose from the tangled mass of wreckage and carried to a safe distance. As the carriers laid them on the ground a terrific explosion shook the air; the tanks of the Curtiss had blown up.

It looked for awhile as if the aviation days of the two boys were over. When they lay in hospital, swathed with bandages and smelling like a drug store on a spree, no one would have said they would be out and walking about within a week, nor that before the end of the suc-

ceeding week they would be clamoring for a chance to go up again. Captain Ring felt that both were finally and definitely cured of all desire to fly. He came in to see them every day, though now he was on active scouting service. When he had time he told them the news or read the papers to them; neither one was allowed to utter a word.

However, a boy at that age is the hardest to kill, and it is easier to kill him than to keep him in bed. The bumps and bruises looked worse than they were, and there were no broken bones, as had at first been feared. The fifth day found them sitting up, and after that there was no keeping them within the confines of the hospital walls. The head physician finally gave his consent to their going out in wheel-chairs, "for the good of the other patients," he said.

A week to the day after their fall, they sat on the sunny side of the big hospital tent and talked over their adventure.

"I wish we could get a look at the chap who caused all the trouble," remarked Tod.

"I'm afraid I kind of spoiled his looks for him. I must have shot him in the face. Queer

how he lived through it, wounded as he was, while the only two unhurt ones of the mix-up were checked out. We must have been born under a lucky star."

"Well, we must have been pretty close to it, then, when we started our slide. Sorry I couldn't have been in at the finish."

"I can't say that I was either. I outwinded you by about fifteen seconds. Here comes Uncle Dan—we'll ask him how the German is making it. How's our bloomin' captive, Uncle Dan? Is he able to sit up and take nourishment yet?"

"Nope. He's in about as bad shape as that machine of yours, and it wasn't worth bringing in for scrap-iron."

"How about the other one—the German plane?"

"Oh—she needs a new coat of paint," laughed the captain. "Your flying master is figuring on putting what's left of it together and making a first-class wheelbarrow out of it."

"Gee, I thought maybe they could fix her up to fly again. Tod and I were planning to—"

"The colonel says he doesn't know whether

to decorate you two as heroes, or to put you in straight-jackets as incurable idiots," remarked the captain cheerfully. "When you fly again I guess it'll be after you've sprouted wings of your own."

"What!" cried both boys together.

Uncle Dan laughed tantalizingly. "You know what they are calling you here at the camp? The 'Smash-Up Twins.' Here comes the colonel now. You can ask him what he said about your future activities."

"Colonel Wroughton, Uncle Dan's just joking when he says we're not to be allowed to fly again, isn't he?"

"Joking? Hum—I guess not. Of course I can't keep you from flying—you're both of you born to be up in the air most of the time anyway, I fancy—but we think too much of you to let you go up again in one of our little old last-year's boats. They weren't made for your style of piloting."

"But when the new machines come over," protested Tod, refusing to let the affair be turned into a jest, with him and Jerry as the point of it. "Captain Ring has a new machine."

"So he has. We'll have a special one made of wrought steel for you two, and then anchor it to the ground. You're too strenuous for the regular army models." He winked jovially at the captain.

"Better go out again, boys," Uncle Dan suggested, coming to the colonel's aid, "and maybe you can bring back one of those big German planes — one that isn't all scrambled. I'd suggest a Number Two Skinner and some red flannel tied on at the end for bait, and you might try casting for it. You threw the gaff into this one a bit too hard for your own good."

"Yes, boys, land another one of the big fellows and I'll let you have it to play with. I'd offer you the one you already netted, only — "

"Only what?" asked Jerry.

"Only she's lost her tail and fins, and her bladder's done busted. Aside from that — "

"Aside from that she's as good as new, I suppose," ventured Jerry sarcastically. "But we can have it to console ourselves with, I take it, if we won't bother grown-ups with teasing to be allowed to go along to the circus."

"It's not so bad as that, youngster. We all

of us admire your pluck, and in a couple of months, after you've all healed up, and kind of steadied down, I guess we'll give you another chance. I'm proud of you—the whole department is — ”

“ But you don't particularly trust us,” finished Tod for him.

“ Pretty raw way of putting it, son, but like most raw things, it cuts pretty close to the bone. What I meant to say is that we're short of machines just now, and we haven't started to fight the Germans with what we've got. We need them for training, and right here and now I give the two of you your diplomas. When we're ready to start fighting I promise that you two will be the first to be fitted out with the best the house has to offer. Is that fair enough? ”

“ Fair enough,” agreed Jerry. “ But your other offer goes—the one about the German machine? ”

“ Sure, and I'll lend you a casting rod and the best piece of silk line — ”

“ The wrecked plane, I mean.”

Both the colonel and Captain Ring roared.

“I promise you that no one but you two shall ever fly in that — that marvel of skyrocketry!” Again he laughed uproariously, and Uncle Dan followed suit. “She’s yours, boys — that’s my last word.”

Jerry and Tod were in for a good deal of chaffing when their request became known to the other embryo flyers. Such a bunch of junk, of twisted, unshapable iron and canvas and wooden struts and braces had never before been seen, was the universal verdict.

Neither Jerry nor Tod had very high hopes. Still, once before, when the first Fulton Aero-plane had been building, they had seen such a wrecked machine, and had helped at putting it back together. In fact — only that is another story — it was Jerry and Tod who had taken that same dismembered plane on its first really successful flight, and that under most trying conditions. So, without building too much on it, they bided their time till sight of the *Vampire*, as they called the wreck to each other, should tell just what chance they had.

When they did finally see it, toward the middle of the third week after the beginning of

their hospital stay, they felt that the account of the wreck had been mild enough. Every brace and stay was twisted and bent; the silk of one plane was ripped to tatters, but the other, by some chance, was almost entire but cried aloud for revarnishing. The motor alone seemed to be in good condition, but there was no telling what serious damage a careful investigation would bring to light even there. Both propeller blades were intact but the shaft was snapped off short. The pilot hood was flattened back, but its housing had protected the control levers from more than the usual twist that everything else had suffered.

"I think," said Tod, after the first survey, "that we'd better go away a while now and sleep over it. It won't look so bad next time."

"Do you really think we can do anything with it?"

"I don't want to think; I just want to hope," answered Tod, but there was little of the latter quality in his voice as he turned away. Truth to tell, there was little food for hope in the battered heap of junk.

However, next day they were back again,

this time with hammers, chisels and wrenches. The adventure of the thing appealed to them. What boy doesn't like to putter with machinery, and what boy but would be tickled half to death with the job of putting together such an abandoned wreck—be it alarm clock or aeroplane? They began by salvaging all parts that showed the slightest chance of repair. The first day showed a pitiful little pile as reward for efforts of the most strenuous sort, but little by little their heap grew. Moreover, a mechanic from the camp, taking pity on their inexperience, came out and lent a hand, with the result that many parts they had discarded as hopeless were now added to the list of possibilities. The man even went so far as to predict that if the motor was undamaged the *Vampire* might yet fly again, and—what was still more encouraging—offered to help with the task. "These jokers make me sick," he said. "They've been asking me if I'd adopted you, or if the twins had changed to triplets."

But even with his help, and the camp carpenter, who sneaked out past the camp humorists to lend a hand now and then, the job

loomed up as one too big for the boys. They tried to interest Uncle Dan, but he professed lack of any desire to see the old wreck fly even if it were possible to put her on her wings again.

Gradually the rest of the fellows lost interest, since the boys took the chaffing so good-naturedly, and the carpenter's best helper, a husky Swede from Detroit who had learned his trade in an automobile factory, was enticed out to help bend struts and fashion new timbers. One day the colonel himself came out and put the seal of his approval on the assistance of the camp crew. The boys had a feeling that he went about among the men afterwards and urged them to lend a hand whenever they could. At any rate, the day after the boys were almost swamped with offers of assistance.

One of the student pilots came smashing down with the twin to the Curtiss the boys had wrecked, and out of the canvas from both crumpled planes the boys were able to fashion a much-patched covering for the left wing of the *Vampire*. The motor had been tested in the camp machine shop and pronounced as good as

new, and Scotch Mac, the camp grouch but a master electrician and all-round handy man, had offered to overhaul the magneto and to supply a new set of starting batteries.

It was a proud day for the two boys, when, set up on her own landing wheels, and with a full spread of canvas, the *Vampire* was hauled into camp for the installing of the motor and the final touches to planes and rear and side controls. Then came what the boys had been expecting:

“What in thunder is this little jigger for here atop the motor?” asked canny Mac. “It’s nothing I ever stacked up against, and I’ve handled just about all of them.”

“I can’t tell you,” answered Jerry, sticking to the letter of the truth even though he could not follow its spirit.

“Yes, and what’s this propeller doing here under the pilot’s seat?” inquired “Jim” Shalty, the mechanician. “And here’s some sort of a black cabinet with a door at the bottom and windows at the front. That’s a new one on me. Did you notice, Mac, the little motor — electric she is — hidden away here

under the seat? What kind of a bird is this, anyway? ”

Both Jerry and Tod, though they were stumped for answers that would satisfy the curiosity of the two without giving any real information, were thankful that they had been allowed so long a breathing spell. No one in the camp, it seemed, had had any suspicion that the *Vampire* was in fact one of those dreaded new German planes — though how they could have failed to guess it, was beyond the comprehension of the young aeroplane builders.

Eventually they decided to take at least Shalty and Mac into their confidence, but only with the object of avoiding further confidence. Tod undertook the task, since it was his father's invention he was shielding. Both men were too sensible to take offence and readily agreed to give the boys the blind assistance they asked, as well as the privacy that would be needed for the final tuning up of the motor.

But if that had been a proud day when they wheeled the reconstructed *Vampire* into the field and into an abandoned hangar, what adjective could describe the glorious September day

when, trim and shining in a new coat of varnish, its canvas taut, every wire and strut tight as a drum, they pushed the new *Vampire* out for a trial flight. The boys had not announced their intention, but in some way the word had got around. A presentable crowd greeted their appearance, and there was a genuine cheer as once out in the center of the field, the two boys turned to face their uninvited audience.

“Speech! Speech!” shouted someone in the bunch, and the rest took it up with deafening insistence.

“Go to it, Jerry,” urged Tod; “you’re the press agent of this concern.”

“Nothing doing. If you’ve got anything to say to that bunch of jokers, you do the saying yourself. All I’ve got to say is ‘good-bye, we’re on our way.’”

“Humph. You’re fussed, that’s all’s the matter with you.”

“I don’t see any roses hanging to your speech-making coat tails.”

For answer Tod jumped up to the pilot’s seat. Standing up there, he turned to the waiting crowd.

"Gentlemen and aviators," he began in a high-pitched voice that soon settled down, "we didn't exactly intend to make our trial flight a public exhibition, especially since we don't know how successful it is going to be. The last time we saw the *Vampire* in action, she was trying her best to spill us out into the clouds. She may do it again to-day. But as long as you're all here, and I know you won't laugh if we chance to break our necks, I'm going to let you in on something — something I had intended to keep to myself for a while, though I am sure there is no harm in telling it.

"You think that Jerry Ring and I and Mr. Shalty and Mr. — er — er — Mac (Tod did not know his proper name) made this machine, and before us the Germans did it. That isn't quite true to the facts. My father made it. It's true. And making it may have cost him his life. This — " he pointed to the *Vampire*, proud in her war paint — "is one of the terrible new German aeroplanes that have been throwing a scare into our friends on the fighting front. It is my father's invention. How the Germans happen to control it — after my father sold it

to Uncle Sam—is a long story, and now isn't quite the time to tell it.

“But if you'll watch us—and the thing works—we'll show you why the French and British are afraid of it. And I'll show you why, once we've got a fleet of these fellows, we're going to win this war. We're going up ten thousand feet—” there was a gasp of astonishment from the crowd—“and we're going to drop sandbag bombs on a twenty-foot square for you. I've got ten bags of sand, and I'm badly mistaken if we don't make at least five clean hits. That's all.”

He jumped from his perch, as cock sure as an English sparrow. He and Jerry brought out a bag of lime they had in readiness, and marked out a big square with three-foot edges. Then, dusting off their hands carelessly on their trouser-legs, they sauntered over to the *Vampire*. Just as they were about to strap themselves in, the colonel walked over briskly.

“No monkeyshines now, youngsters,” he commanded. “If that machine's what you say it is, why we want someone around to tell us about it. Good luck aloft!”

Tod strapped himself into the pilot's seat and Jerry climbed in beside him. "I'm ready when you are," he announced.

For answer, Tod reached over and turned on the gas. He pressed down the starting lever, at the same time warping the rear elevator. Almost without a quiver the big motor took the juice, her first hum rising to a shriek. Tod threw in the clutch. He threw over another lever at the same instant. Instead of running along the ground, in the usual manner of aeroplanes, without a jar the *Vampire* rose directly into the air. With incredible speed it shot skyward. "Jerusha, Jerry, I believe I've discovered dad's new device—the one your uncle told us about. It's that big propeller underneath. I threw it on—that's what's lifting us so fast. And you know what that means? Jerusha, it means that we can stop over a given spot just about as long as we like. We simply go straight up instead of going ahead."

There was no roar to this motor. The muffler killed practically all sound and vibration. The only noise was the whirr of the propellers and the whistling of the wind past taut wires.

“I thought it was something that had to do with that little black box with the windows,” objected Jerry.

“I know what that is. It’s a riggin’ to supply oxygen and to keep the air pressure right so that we can go away on up. It fits right down and buttons around the necks of the crew—but the buttoner thing is gone. What does the gauge show now?”

“Three thousand feet. Were you just joking about that ten thousand?”

“Not on your life! Watch the gauge and tell me when we get there.”

So Jerry watched. He also watched the aviation field and the spectators growing smaller and smaller below. It was surprising how fast they rose. Almost before he knew it, Jerry saw the gauge register another three thousand feet, and he began to button his coat about him. Another thousand feet and he turned up his coat collar. Another, and he drew on his heavy gauntlets. Eight thousand feet; the colonel and his party were pinheads below.

He began to feel uncomfortable; the cold was

not all that bothered him. There was a thumping in his chest, and his head ached. He tried to locate the white target below, but strain as he would he could see nothing but a blue-gray blur. As he reached for the binoculars he glanced at the gauge. Nine thousand feet. He turned to Tod to tell him their height. The boy's face was bloodless, strained, but there was an eager look in his eyes that said "ten thousand or bust."

Jerry finally located the square of white. It was a bit sunward of their position. As he straightened up he read the gauge.

Ten thousand feet!

He laid his hand on Tod's arm. "Enough," he tried to say, but the word would not come through his numbed lips. Besides, his tongue was swollen to double its normal size. But Tod understood. He understood too when Jerry pointed below and then ahead. He brought the *Vampire* level, then moved slowly ahead. Jerry raised his hand, then brought it down sharply.

They were directly over the target.

Then came what Mr. Fulton was mayhap paying his life for. The big machine came to a

dead stop. It wavered there for a brief instant, and then, straight as a die it rose without losing or gaining an inch in lateral position.

"One, to try the wind," thought Jerry to himself as he heaved over the first sandbag.

It plumped earthward, Jerry following its drop through the glasses. It struck; the bag burst under the strain and the sand made a great splotch easily seen through the binoculars. At least twenty feet to the east. In obedience to Jerry's signal the *Vampire* shifted. Another bag coursed downward. Plop!

Dead center!

As fast as he could chuck them overboard the other eight bags followed. He did not wait to see where they had landed. He tried to shout to Tod. "Down!" was what he wanted to say, but he found he could not even whisper. But Tod needed no urging.

Under power they shot out of the sky as steeply as Tod dared. After a bit breathing became easier, and finally they were even able to talk, but they were too weak from the strain to feel much like extensive conversation. Tod did remark:

“Guess we’ll cut out the circus stunts for to-day. I feel as if solid earth is good enough for me.”

Jerry merely nodded. But Tod had not waited for an answer. Down the last hundred feet they plunged in a long swoop. The landing wheels struck, bounced, struck again. Tod shut off the power—then fainted dead away.

When he came to, he was lying stretched out on the grass, Captain Ring bending anxiously over him.

“Did we hit it?” asked Tod weakly.

For answer Uncle Dan raised the boy’s head, and with his free hand pointed across the field.

A mound of brown sand, and about it a square of white.

CHAPTER XIII

BIG NEWS

The next few days were spent in working out a few kinks in the *Vampire*. With the help of Scotch Mac, whom they now took further into their confidence, they began work on the altitude device. It was impossible to obtain leather of the proper size, but they compromised by using a piece of rubberized cloth bought from a wagon-maker in the village. It took ingenuity, and lots of flaps and buttons, and they finally decided to make the hood a two-man affair instead of the three it was meant to be. When it was done it formed a practically air-tight compartment, and gave one the comfortable feeling of having one's head fastened in the stocks of the guillotine. However, so far as they could tell from a ground test, it worked, thanks to Mac's knowledge of compression engines.

On the fourth day after their flight the colonel came to them. His manner was grave, and they

noticed an expression of doubt on his face as he greeted them.

"Boys," he said, "I've got a proposition to make to you, although I haven't any business even thinking of it. But I need help; and you two are the only ones I can turn to just now. Captain Ring had a nasty spill out of his machine yesterday, just this side of Camp Nine, and while it didn't hurt him much, it sure did muss up his plane. That leaves me without a single machine fast enough to keep out of its own way — excepting the — the — what you call it? *Vampire*? Can you carry three?"

"Easiest thing you know."

"You remember Lieutenant Crissey? Smallish man with red side whiskers? Well, you may have noticed that he hasn't returned since he left on that scouting trip four days ago. He's two days overdue. This morning — about ten minutes ago, to be exact — I had word from him. We're pretty close here to the French lines, although we're almost in the heart of France. But right here's where the German invasion bit deepest into French soil. So once in a while we are able to get word from behind

the lines — where they haven't driven or starved the French inhabitants out. As nearly as I can judge from my scanty information, Crissey was chased by four German planes and had to swing pretty far into German territory. He managed to give his pursuers the slip all right, but had to come down when his gas ran out. That was always his failing — running out of gas, either verbal or machine-filled. He's over there now, hidden in the house of a peasant, his machine covered by a strawstack. We've got to get to him."

"If we just knew his location —"

"I know it—I'm going with you. That is, if you're game to undertake it. It's a man-size job, boys."

"Well, we've got a man-size machine here, and with you along I guess we can keep out of mischief. When do you want to start?"

"That's the right spirit. Half an hour—will that give you plenty of time?"

"We're always ready. But we'll need a full supply of gas, and we'll have to tie on a tank for Crissey. Will you give us an order for it?"

"Already given. You go and get it. There'll

be a box of grub ready for you too. And there's that new gun that just came in. Mac will mount it for you—I've already instructed him. You'll need a revolver apiece. I'll report to you here in half an hour."

After he was gone, the two boys looked at each other, delight written all over their faces. The old man trusted them after all!

Then they got busy. While Tod overhauled the machine minutely, Jerry set about getting in the stores. He brought a big can of gas to take along, strapping it underneath the foot-rests, just clear of the under propeller. The box of food was tied under his seat—the one before which Scotch Mac was already busy mounting a dandy aerial machine gun of the latest type. Tod finished his inspection as Jerry came out with his last load—the revolvers. An instant later came the colonel. Under his arm he carried a satchel made out of a gunny sack by adding rope handles. "Bombs," he said casually as he tied them in front of his seat.

Tod shouted "All aboard!" as he climbed in, the other two settled in their places, and with a sudden lift the *Vampire* was started on

her rescue trip. "Where away?" asked Tod.

"Straight up, and straight east," said the colonel tersely. That was the last word he spoke for over an hour. Then he broke his silence only to remark: "Better go up a little higher here; we're likely to meet German scout planes any time. Another five miles — north now, by a little east, and we'll descend to wait come-dark."

Tod changed their course and fifteen minutes later, in obedience to the colonel's gesture, began coasting down for a landing place. Below them was what looked at this height like a tiny village, but as they came lower they saw it was a military encampment, with tents instead of houses. Tod looked questioningly at the colonel as soon as he realized this, but the colonel smiled reassuringly.

"That's the place," he said. "After it's dark we can go the rest of the way by compass. This is the spot where Crissey's underground telephone system brought the news to. Now see how easy you can light. I'm too old to stand very hard bumps."

They landed just in time for chuck, and the

boys were ready to do full justice to the meal that was set before them. For a wonder, the ever-present army beef stew was not served, though the navy bean held its honored place on the bill-of-fare.

“High living,” laughed Jerry, gazing raptly at his plate. “My nose told me that fresh pork had been near these beans, and here, by the tail of the *Vampire*, I see, behold and contemplate a visible portion of the unclean beast. Down with uncleanness, say I.”

“Down with your cannibal jokes,” retorted Tod. “Who should indulge in high life anyway if not aviators?”

“Only my best of good manners keeps me from heaving a loaf of bread at your inspired but empty head for that,” responded Jerry. “Pass the bean pot and have done with this irreverent talk.”

The sun set clear, but a low bank of clouds began to roll out of the east soon after. The hidden sun caught them as they rose higher, so that daylight stayed with them long beyond its usual time. But at last the dark had grown deep enough to suit the colonel and he gave

the signal for starting. After they were up a good two thousand feet, he spoke:

“Turn south now, and go back over the route we followed this morning. Yes — ” as Tod turned toward him, perplexed by the order — “yes, you see, we’re not the only ones who have that underground messenger service I spoke of. We are going back now, apparently, our mission accomplished. When we are well out of ken of the camp we can swing into our true course.”

A few minutes later he gave the order to shift direction and now they whirled due east at the *Vampire’s* best speed. Nearly an hour passed, in complete silence. “We’re mighty near the border now; we’ve made sixty miles against the wind. Slow down now and keep a sharp watch below. We’re looking for a town.”

Five minutes more passed, when Jerry’s “Light below — houses, lots of them,” caused the colonel to give his final directions:

“We’re headed due east now. Swing south — follow that dark, curving line there. That’s trees, along the banks of a little river. The

place we want is about four miles out, and back from the river a good mile. That fool Crissey didn't think it worth while to say which side of the river it was on, but I guess we can find it in time. We'll know it by a long covered shed running from the barn to a hillside vineyard—a hundred feet long at least."

It took a half-hour's coursing back and forth across the country to locate the place, and it was the colonel himself who found it.

"Now see if we can locate the strawstack, after we get a little lower, and we can land next to it. There's a big, level field for you to drop in."

But they were saved the trouble of hunting out the strawstack. A light suddenly appeared below, and a voice shouted: "Ahoy, aloft, drop on the lantern."

"That's Crissey, by his voice. Reckless as ever," grumbled the colonel. "How does he know us from the deuce of spades. Lucky for him we're not cruising Germans. But down with your helm."

"Down she is, sir," answered Tod.

They landed straddle of a ditch, Tod mis-

calculating at the last, but aside from a generous jolting there was no mishap. Crissey came running up to them and helped the colonel alight; the latter groaned dismally as he stepped out. "My old bones never could stand the damp night air," he grumbled. "Next time, young man, you run out of gas where we can get to you by daylight."

Crissey chuckled; he knew the colonel of old. "You'll be glad I got lost anywhere when you find out what I learned by my little unexpected visit over here. But it'll keep—and our stay here may not. Where's the tank?"

Jerry helped him pour the gasoline into the gas tank of the other machine, while Tod and the colonel burrowed it out of the stack of straw.

Then they were ready to go, only—

"Got a five-spot on you, colonel? Or a ten would be better. I kind of want to make it up to the fellow who owns this hay—"

"Where is he?"

"The Germans would give a thousand to know. But his better half—and she's a good one, at that—is back at the house—"

The colonel had already disappeared in the dusk.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" he growled brusquely, coming back a few minutes later. "We're wasting a lot of valuable time here standing around and talking weather and crops."

No further time was lost in getting under way. Jerry climbed in beside Crissey, while the colonel rode with Tod. Crissey's machine was cold, and balked a bit at first, but it was not many seconds before its roar had steadied down into a drone of promising volume.

"Cut loose," he called. "I'll follow you as close as I can."

The *Vampire* took the air like a bird, but Crissey's plane wobbled uncertainly and Jerry breathed a little hope that the Germans would make no attempt to follow them. It was an army aeroplane of ancient model, one that had seen service in Mexico, and should have been given its honorable discharge long before. However, after they had reached and passed the little town it did well enough, though its speed still left much to be desired.

But Jerry's German pursuers did not materialize. The return trip was made without accident, save that once Crissey had to come down to change a spark plug that had suddenly started short-circuiting. Then, too, well behind the French lines, the colonel lost his way on one occasion and had to stop at a town to find out where he was. But that was within ten miles of home-camp, so little time was wasted.

Still, it was well after ten o'clock, thanks to Crissey's machine, before they pushed the two planes into their hangars. Both Jerry and Tod were in hopes, as they confessed to each other in eager whispers, that the colonel would let them trail along to his tent and be in on the conference when Crissey told what he had discovered back there in the strawstack, but the colonel was of another mind.

"Time for taps, youngsters. Crissey tells me his secret will keep till morning, and ten o'clock is late enough for old bones — and young ones — to be resting under the blankets. So you chase along. Ten o'clock to-morrow you can come to my tent, and Crissey will break his news. From a hint he just gave me, it

concerns you two just as much as it does me.”

“He’s heard of dad!” exclaimed Tod, but the colonel interrupted the eager questions the boy began hurling at Crissey.

“Enough, now, son. To bed with you — both of you. When you’re as old as I am, you’ll have learned there’s nothing that won’t keep till morning.”

“Guess he never ate ice cream,” chuckled Jerry to his chum as they walked away. “But I just bet it’s news from your father. Bed? Huh — I’ll bet I don’t sleep a wink for thinking about it. He’d better have let Crissey spill it out right away.”

Which was hardly the truth, for once under their blankets, Jerry became shorter in his remarks, and the spaces between them grew longer, and finally, where interested words had been, there was only a big blank space punctuated by a near approach to a pair of snores, one falsetto, the other deep bass.

Next morning it took the second call to rouse either of the boys, but once they were far enough awake to realize what they were doing, it did not take them long to be out and eager

for breakfast. After that they had to hunt up Captain Ring, who, fortunately, was not on duty that day, and discuss the forthcoming news with him.

To their delight he agreed with them that Crissey must have stumbled onto some trace of Tod's father. They could hardly wait till ten o'clock for confirmation of their hopes.

Along about that time Crissey strolled by their tent. "Thought perhaps you might be going up to the colonel," he greeted them tantalizingly. "Had an errand up that way myself and figured I might take you along for company."

"If you weren't such a good fellow, Crissey, I'd like to take a good punch at you for rubbing it in. Likely as not you just found a hen's nest there under the straw, and were figuring on making yourself solid with the old man by bringing him along the eggs. He'd look nice now, wouldn't he, eating an omelet with feathers on it. I found a nest like that under a straw-stack once and —"

"Or maybe he found a rabbit's nest under there, Jerry, and wants the colonel to go back

with him next Easter and get some nice colored eggs. He doesn't know that's just a German fairy tale, just like the German account of who started the war."

"Well," laughed Crissey, "it'll be ten o'clock by the time we get there. Want to go along and see what was in the nest I found?"

They did. The colonel sat in a camp-made lounging chair, propped up with pillows. "Now look what you young scamps did to me. You too, Crissey—you're the cause of it all. I had to eat my breakfast on the ground, lying down beside it like a dog—or a salamander or something. Well, sir, what have you to say for yourself? Eh, Crissey?"

"Well, sir, first off—"

"Cut that and get to the dessert. We've already had the soup and fish, and last night we had the—the beans, wasn't it, boys? Tell us the news first, and then maybe we'll listen to how you got it."

"They're making a new aeroplane in Germany, as you know, and the shop where they're turning them out is at Essen. There's an American there—"

“ Ah! ” cried both boys at once. “ It’s him! ”

“ Yes, ” continued Crissey, “ I guess it is. No name was mentioned, but there isn’t a doubt it’s Mr. Fulton, Tod’s dad. It’s a big joke among the Germans — the officers, that is, because the privates half of them don’t even know what the war’s about. But the American doesn’t know he’s in Germany. Fact! He thinks he’s somewhere along the Jersey coast, over in the States, and that he’s being bribed by a big concern that’s trying to hold up our government on a big contract to furnish war-planes. But, so far as I could tell, the bribe hasn’t worked as yet, though they’ve built several machines. There’s some little kink — or some new stunt about it — that they’re keen to squeeze out of him before they do for him and throw him to the crows. ”

“ But where in — in Essen is he? ” demanded the colonel testily. “ You might as well say a man is in the Sahara Desert. ”

“ Just about, ” agreed Crissey. “ They spoke of the ‘ armory ’ and I take it that he’s confined there, but he is allowed to get out occa-

sionally, because they have taken him out and tried to entice him to run one of his own machines. In fact, they took him up in one, tied in the pilot's seat, with another pilot standing in front of him and working the levers till they were up a hundred feet or so, and then they cut him loose and the other pilot stepped out of the way."

"What did he do?"

"Let them all take a good tumble. All he got out of it was a lot of bruises, but one of the others was killed. But here's the meat of the whole business: Our friend whose straw-stack I burgled speaks German like a native. In fact he was born in Alsace of a German mother. Among the Germans he passes for one of them—or did until he happened to slip up on a little job he was doing for General Joffre. Now there's a price on his head.

"But he's got nerve enough for a Yankee, and at the present moment he's not more than a dozen miles from Essen, disguised as a peasant market woman—he was an actor, I forgot to tell you, before he turned farmer. At any rate, his wife is going to get word to him and he

is going to Essen. In about ten days at the most you can expect to have definite news of Mr. Fulton, and whether and how a rescue can be effected. And now let me tell you how I learned all this."

"Another time, Crissey. You're a clever chap, although a bit inclined to hunt the spot light. We know just about what happened. You had gone to the house to sneak a pie from the lady's pantry window, when German officers came along, looking for an American aviator who had gone by in a canal boat. 'Caught, by the Great Cream Puff!' you exclaimed, seeing all retreat cut off, and advance impossible, because of two virgin pumpkin pies there on the window ledge, and your trousers had just come from the tailor's. But no. Zounds, no. Hastily grasping the custard pie — pumpkin pie, I mean — by the rim, you wrapped it completely around your face. Thus disguised as a pile of cabbage about to be krauted, you escaped detection — and the band played on. One of the soldiers sang a song and by taking the first, fourth and third words of each line you deciphered the secret you have just disclosed.

You might just as well confess up. Ain't it?"

Which was highly undignified language for an officer of our army — but human, after all.

Crissey grinned understandingly. The colonel was his uncle by marriage and privileged thereby.

"With these few remarks," continued the colonel, more seriously, "we will close our testimony meeting. I have a little task to perform — one I should have taken care of some time ago. I think perhaps I'd better send a cable to Washington and tell them there that the Fulton Aeroplane is on deck and waiting to be copied, and that its inventor will be with it as soon as Yankee wits can find the way."

CHAPTER XIV

AN EXPLODED RESCUE

Germany is said to have the most wonderful spy system in the world, but the best-oiled machinery will jam once in a while. A little, insignificant Frenchman, crippled with rheumatism and wrinkled with age and debility, put a decided crimp into the Kaiser's plans despite the efforts of his best agents. For months he had eluded them; for months he had been smuggling across or through or under the lines, information of great value to the French. And now he was to crown his career with a master stroke.

He reached Essen and within twenty-four hours had seen Mr. Fulton. Less than six hours later he had managed to get word to the captive, and had formulated a plan for the rescue. After that it was an easy matter for him to use his old-time means of communication to carry the details of his plan to the French lines, where his information was

promptly relayed to the colonel. All this he did as coolly and easily as if he did not realize that a single misstep meant ignominious death before a firing squad.

An aeroplane, reasoned Vimar, ex-actor, semi-retired farmer, present-time spy, had successfully crossed to his farm once; it could do so again. If possible he would have Mr. Fulton there, if the escape from Essen could be managed without outside aid. Otherwise, at the farm there would be waiting details of a new plan.

The colonel scratched his head. He was up against it for fair. Prudence told him that it was the wildest sort of folly to send two boys into the very heart of Germany on a lone chance like this. On the other hand, room had to be reserved in the machine for an extra passenger on the back trip. He might send Captain Ring along with one of the boys—but Captain Ring could not pilot the *Vampire* with the certainty that would be necessary on such an expedition; and the success of the whole undertaking might depend upon having a substitute pilot. Moreover, Captain Ring did not

know the country. Of course, the colonel realized, he could go himself, but that plan was open to the same serious objection: the only thing he knew how to do on the *Vampire* was to clutch the rail and thank his lucky stars that someone at the levers knew more about its management than he did.

No, there was no better plan, even if that of sending the two boys was a weak one. So he sent for Tod and Jerry.

“Now remember, boys,” he said after he had given them the commission, “I’m giving you a big job, bigger than I have any right to saddle on you. But you’ve come through before, and dogged if I don’t believe you’ll do it this time. But you’ll have to hold yourself down. Remember that willingness to take risks isn’t always bravery — but, there, I’m not going to preach to you. Here’s a chart, showing towns and roads, but I don’t expect it’ll be much use to you. Here’s good-bye, good luck and hoping that you don’t have to go any farther than Vimar’s farm.”

Both boys realized to the full the importance of their undertaking, and they resolved that

they would not lose their heads. They went over every detail of preparation and equipment with the coolness and foresight of veterans. They even took along an extra sheep-lined leather coat for Mr. Fulton in case they should have to seek the higher altitudes in order to elude pursuing Germans. The machine gun was still in place and they commandeered a goodly supply of ammunition for it, as well as taking along the bombs the colonel had brought out on their other trip.

At last all was ready. The colonel came out to say a last good-bye and Uncle Dan gave each boy a silent but hearty hand-shake. No one else knew of their dangerous quest, so the field was deserted.

"We're off," said Jerry, with a wave of the hand. "We'll bring him home, don't you worry."

"We'll worry, boy, but we know you'll do your best. *Auf wiedersehen*—may that be the only German you run into."

It was five o'clock in the afternoon. The sun was still an hour high, and daylight would last at least another hour. They had ample time,

so Jerry, who was pilot for the first leg of the trip, did not open her up very far. At that they were making better than thirty miles an hour. The sky was clear and there was no wind—every condition was favorable.

As the sun dropped below the horizon they were over familiar ground—the spot where the colonel had ordered them to shoot due east. It was still too light to go any farther, as the German lines were only a few miles distant, but they did not wish to descend. So Jerry shot the *Vampire* skyward. Barely moving, at a height of seven thousand feet, they waited for friendly darkness.

A star peeped out, and another. The earth beneath them showed misty; gray shadows stole across it. “They’ll never spot us at this height,” Jerry remarked. “What do you say we chance it?”

“Fifteen minutes more waiting won’t hurt us, Jerry—and we promised the colonel.”

“Right you are, but it’s getting pesky cold up here next the stars.”

So they waited another quarter hour, Jerry growing more impatient with each passing min-

ute. To the second he held back, and then, at top speed he shot into the east. "How much are we missing seventy miles?" he asked.

"You'll have to slow down to hit her. The old *Vamp's* humming like a top, isn't she?"

At that rate it did not take them long to eat up the few miles to the town where the river flowed between wooded banks. At a height of a little over a mile they crossed it and followed the line of trees, coming down a little as they neared the spot where they would have to turn off. This time they were familiar with the long shed and the strawstack. They were only a few hundred feet up, and flying slowly, by this time, so that landing in the broad level field was no trick at all, even in the inky darkness.

"I suppose we'll have to go to the house," ventured Tod. "There doesn't seem to be anyone around here awaiting our arrival."

"I expect you'd better go up while I stay here and guard the machine."

"All right. In case you hear any commotion, climb in and have her ready for a quick shoot."

He disappeared into the darkness, and Jerry sat back to await developments. But they were slow in coming, and he almost fell asleep waiting for Tod's return. When he did finally show up he nearly scared Jerry out of his wits, for he came around the opposite side of the stack.

"Well, what's the news?" demanded the startled boy, as soon as Tod drew near.

"The only real news I have is that we're to hide our machine here under the strawstack and crawl in there ourselves until something happens. Darned if I see how we can get the *Vamp* under that handful of hay."

"What's the trouble?—no word from Vimar?"

"Oh, yes. There was a letter. There's been some hitch in the plan. Dad wasn't able to elude his guards in quite the way they had figured—or maybe it was Vimar himself. I couldn't tell. His written English leaves much to the imagination. So we're to wait here for further word. If it wasn't that we promised the colonel—"

"What then?"

“ I’d harness up the old *Vampire* and go on to Essen! ”

“ We couldn’t do a thing. ”

“ We could that. We could get there in a few hours and have all night to get in touch with Vimar. They can’t be guarding dad very closely — they wouldn’t anyway, right there in the depths of darkest Germany. Why, for all we know, Vimar may be needing our help this minute! ”

“ How soon does his wife expect to hear from him? ”

“ His wife? Oh, pshaw, she’s a jellyfish sort of creature — nice, you know, but no pep. She thinks we came from town to get some money her husband owes us. Why, *she* didn’t know that Crissey had his aeroplane here under the hay! No, we’ll just have to figure this thing out by ourselves. The only thing she does know is where Vimar can be reached, and that’s at a place five miles or so this side of Essen. The people there — I guess he doesn’t stay there but just comes and gets messages — are German, but close relatives. Even they might not know where he is now. ”

“ That doesn’t sound very promising for us. Maybe we’d better wait, after all.”

“ Well, let’s give him till midnight. The letter came this morning, early, and he’s had time to make a dozen new plans. In the meanwhile we’d better look the *Vampire* over and be sure she’s shipshape for action at a second’s notice.”

After a careful inspection the boys satisfied themselves that the machine was in perfect condition, and they sat back against the straw-stack, talking, but in low tones that would not carry over a dozen feet. But as the moments passed their remarks became lower and lower and farther and farther apart. They were waiting, unconsciously listening for something, they knew not what.

And it came.

A sound of running feet, feet that staggered uncertainly for all their haste. Light flashed out from an opened door; the door was slammed shut. After that a brief silence; then, shrilling out on the night loneliness, a woman’s scream, a cry of mortal agony.

Jerry and Tod clutched at their revolvers as they darted toward the house. There was no

telling what was taking place in that isolated spot. They reached the door together and searched for the knob. Jerry found it, gave a terrific tug that almost unhinged the door, and the two of them lunged into the brightly lighted room.

A man lay stretched full-length on the floor. Over him crouched Madam Vimar, moaning and sobbing. The man was dead, or dying, there was no doubt of it. A bullet hole through his neck—or was it a bayonet stab?—and a great stain of blood on his peasant's blouse, just below the heart, told the story. It was Vimar; in a paralyzing moment of despairing certainty the boys realized that. The Germans had finally got him. It must have happened near home, for the poor fellow could never have gone far so wounded. Perhaps even now pursuit was close at hand, anxious to be in at the death.

Jerry started back to the door, to bar it against surprise. At the sudden noise the woman threw herself across the prostrate body. To the surprise of the boys, they saw the pallid figure open its eyes and in a low, pain-hushed voice try to reassure the woman. Then

he saw the boys. His eyes lighted up with a gleam of pleased recognition.

"The Americans," he whispered weakly, then after a long pause — "I must tell them."

"You have news — more news from Mr. Fulton?" exclaimed Jerry, in his eagerness forgetting the man's condition.

"News — yes — " gasped Vimar. "It is accompli — "

"How — how!" desperately, for it was evident that Vimar was sinking fast.

"The great fleet — Maze — dawn — he — Marie, are they still here — the boys?" His eyes were glassy, staring fixedly into space. The dark shadow was seeking out his heart.

A long silence, as much as thirty heartbeats when they are growing slow. Vimar's head dropped back upon the floor. His wife began a wild sobbing that chilled the blood of the two boys. Anxious as they were to hear the man's message, they could not question more.

Then — "The great fleet — the — fleet!" cried the man, and made to rise. A spasm of pain crossed his features; he shuddered back. A groan. His jaw dropped.

"He is dead," said Tod simply. "She can't stay here alone, and we can't remain here much longer. There's a road out in front of the house. I'll chase down it till I come to the next neighbors. You wait here till I come back."

"All right, Captain," agreed Jerry, "but you'll have to mosey along."

It was half an hour before Tod returned, bringing with him an old man, nearly eighty, and a younger woman, his daughter-in-law.

Tod did not come in, and as soon as he decently could Jerry joined him outside. "Let's get out of here as soon as we can," he suggested. "We can talk over plans up above. I'm getting so I don't like the ground; it seems so much safer up in the air."

Tod agreed. They fell silent as they neared the stack, for the events of the night were making them cautious. Jerry even fancied he saw a helmeted German sitting close to where the *Vampire* butted up against the straw, but they soon found it was only one of Vimar's hogs rooting for a bed.

Reassured, they soon had the *Vampire* ready

for flight. Tod acted as pilot and he soon had the ship well up in the clouds. Neither one spoke for some time. Finally Tod remarked casually:

“ I looked for Essen on the chart while it was still light.”

“ Uhuh.”

“ We could make it in three hours easy, even allowing for delays and a spell of searching. What do you suppose poor Vimar meant by his ‘ great fleet ’? ”

“ Probably meant the place where they keep the aeroplanes there at Essen. They must be making a bunch of new models just like the *Vamp* here. Do you suppose that your father — ”

“ That’s it, I bet. He’s hiding in there — waiting for us to come and get him. What do you say we — ”

“ Of course,” interrupted Jerry. “ We can’t do any less now than make the attempt. Even the colonel wouldn’t call this taking unnecessary chances. But we don’t know where the place is, even if we find Essen. And even if we found the works, we’d have a hard time

locating the hangar or shed. We'll have to do most of our work in the darkness."

"But if we could find those friends of Vimar's, maybe —"

"I know the name of the town and the name of the people. Mrs. Vimar told me. But you can't go around at two o'clock in the morning getting people to their doors to ask them if Julius Brauer lives there. No, it's straight to Essen or nothing."

"Straight to Essen then. Let's *go!*"

They went. Tod saw to it that not a second was lost while he held the levers. As, after a bit, they began to pass over dimly lighted clusters of houses he would remark in most commonplace tones, as if he had not spent hours studying the map of Germany: "Webeln" or "That's Franklein."

Jerry said nothing at these evidences of superior wisdom, though secretly he believed his chum was guessing most of the time. But when Tod began to supplement his towns with: "That's sixty-three miles from Essen," or "fifty-seven," then he began to revise his opinion.

“How big a place is this Essen, anyway?”

“Jerusha, Jerry, I don’t know. It’s a pretty good sized chunk of a place. We ought to be striking its suburbs in about ten more minutes. The closer we get the more foolish our plan seems to me. We’d have to land at the very edge, and then make our way across miles of town. At this time of night we’d be stopped before we got fifty steps. And you can bet that aeroplane works is guarded day and night, inside and out. I’m not getting cold feet, Jerry, you know that, but by Jiminy I don’t see where we’ve got a ghost of a show.”

“Well, we’ll have to make up our minds pretty soon. There’s a haze of light right ahead of us, and that means Essen or I miss my guess.”

“At any rate, we ought to cut across the place. It seems to be pretty well lighted up and we could get a fair idea of where things lie—for our next trip.”

“Shoot ahead. I’ll have the glasses ready.”

Essen is a fair-sized city and it was a long while before they came to the business part of it, flying so slowly. More than once they

thought they had located the home of the "great fleet," but each time it turned out to be a public building or a factory site. "I fancy we'll find it out on the edge of things," suggested Jerry. "They probably have a flying field in with it, and that takes room. Let's get out a bit and fly around the edge."

The night was growing late, and Tod was of the opinion that they ought to be thinking of starting back. However, the circle of the city would not take long, and so he swung the *Vampire* out on a wide curve that carried them well away from the center of town. They had not been observed, so far, thanks to the darkness of the night and the silence of their engines, but Tod thought it wise to go up another thousand feet. It was well that he did.

Below them loomed the spacious grounds of a great estate. Off in the one corner stood a group of buildings of all sorts—not at all the kind of place one would fancy as the building place of Germany's air fleet. All was still below there—one instant. The next—suddenly, from every quarter of the wide field rose a roaring as of a thousand automobiles. And

then into the air sprang at least thirty monster aeroplanes. A subdued radiance glowed over the ground, and against this gleam the rising horde looked like a swarm of gigantic locusts.

“Jerusha!” exclaimed Tod, throwing the motor into high. “We’ve got to get out of here in a hurry.”

“They don’t see us, Tod. That must be Vimar’s ‘great fleet.’ They’re starting out on some expedition.”

“They may not see us now, but it won’t be many seconds before they do. By gracious, Jerry, I do believe they’ve spotted us. Believe me, I’m going to show them a clean pair of heels.”

They were detected, there was no doubt of that, even before a shell exploded a hundred feet or so behind them—a polite request to lie by and establish their identity.

“Shall I give them a shot?” asked Jerry.

“No—no, we can’t afford to waste the shell. And we’ll gain a half instant on them while they are waiting to see if we stop. We’ve a good hundred miles to go—and if anything goes wrong—”

CHAPTER XV

THE SKY FISH

Nothing happened — that is, the *Vampire* did not break down — but the race that followed was full of thrills. Possibly the Germans figured that the *Vampire* was a French or English scouting plane and was scurrying away now to carry news of the coming air invasion. At any rate, they spared no pains in trying to overtake the two boys. In every way but one the pursuers had the advantage. They could spread out and so cut off any attempt to turn and elude pursuit in that way. Their machines were just as fast and could fly as high. And their pilots were seasoned men.

But Tod and Jerry were flying for life. They would take chances the others would not. Into the night the lone machine whirred, while close behind it followed thirty determined enemies — thirty angry hawks after one lone English sparrow.

“They’re not gaining on us,” cried Jerry

exultantly. "Ten miles reeled off and they haven't crept an inch closer."

"No — but wait till we reach the German lines. They've sent word ahead, and there will be a hundred machines waiting to head us off no matter where we try to break through."

"What of that?" laughed Jerry. "If we can keep away from these fellows, we can show the little ones at the front a few tricks in high climbing that they don't know about."

The pursuing machines were seen as great flitting shadows that now and then crept across a star showing between patches of dark clouds. Tod was not so sure Jerry was right; he had a feeling that one or two of those German monsters were drawing menacingly close. Once in a while a shell would burst close beside them and he was afraid they were getting his range, but he dared not sacrifice a single fraction of speed in dodging about. Jerry had swung his machine gun about and now and then fired a fusillade at the foremost of the Germans, but with no visible result.

This continued for upwards of half an hour, when they figured that full forty miles had been

covered. Suddenly a machine came out of the night before them. So intent had they been in watching the sky behind, that the newcomer was within a hundred yards before they saw it. There was nothing for it but to go straight ahead, trusting to luck. Within fifty yards the strange machine passed them, raking them all the way with machine gun fire. It was a miracle that they escaped unhurt; the planes were hit in a dozen places, and bullets spattered against the motor and whined angrily off the metal railings.

“Now where in thunder did *it* come from?” Jerry wanted to know when he realized that the menace was passed and they were still alive.

“They put one over on us. That’s one of the herd back yonder. They’ve been swinging us in a circle—or trying to. One of them shot straight ahead, along the side lines, and the others maneuvered me into angling off a bit. After this I’ll follow the compass. Lucky for us if they sent only one out.”

Another fifteen minutes passed without incident, when in the midst of a hilly region, from all about below them, cannon began to vomit

up projectiles that exploded on every side. The *Vampire* tossed like a cockleshell boat in an Atlantic storm. Several times it took Tod's best handling to avoid a spill. Not one of the hundreds of shells fired hit them, most of them falling short, for they were traveling a good mile up. Nevertheless, Tod thought it wise to add another thousand feet or so to their height.

That allowed the foremost of their pursuers to gain on them, and a lively duel ensued between Jerry and the marksman on the plane below. Either Jerry scored a hit, or the pilot decided to try safer and surer tactics, for gradually the *Vampire* pulled ahead till it had about the same lead as before.

Hardly had the boys noticed this than they noticed another astounding fact. The other machines had dropped back as well. They were slowing down—they were pulling together.

But that was not the remarkable thing about it all. A single machine seemed to be the center of the lessening ring. It alone seemed to be going forward with unabated speed, gradually drawing toward the forward edge of the ring. It looked like some gigantic game, the shadowy

planes like mysterious chessmen upon a cloud-marked board. While the boys watched, the lone machine had broken through the ring. And then the unexplainable happened.

From every machine save that one alone belched a perfect tattoo of machine gun and aerial cannon fire. To the boys' astonishment, not a single missile whistled past their ears. Not a shell burst about them. Instead, all about the lone aeroplane the air was aflame with bursting bombs. It seemed to crumple, dive, then right itself and career gamely on. Then it disappeared from the ken of the two boys—as did all the rest, for now the *Vampire* led the pack by nearly half a mile.

"Guess they've given up the chase," concluded Tod. "But what in the name of Jerusha-Ann were they doing? It looked as if they were firing at one of their own bunch."

"But they couldn't have been. Either that fellow was an enemy plane that had blundered into them like we did—and it did look different somehow—or it was something else they were firing at, maybe down below."

"But we could see the shells hitting all

around it, Jerry. Whatever it was, it sure saved our hash. Another half hour and we can drop down behind the French lines. Say! What's that business off to our left? Jerusha, I do believe it's another one of those aeroplanes that cut across to meet us."

"She's not coming this way. That bunch back there must have split up and each is following on his own hook. Or maybe this was where they had to swing off to hit the line, and they sent one to get us—if it could."

"It's got us beat for speed. When I first saw it, it was away behind—now look at it! Even, and nosing ahead every minute. Try a shot or two at him, Jerry."

Jerry tried, but the only result was a bigger burst of speed out of the other machine. "Huh," he grunted. "Anybody'd think, to see us, that we were chasing her instead of the other way round. I'll take another whang at the pesky thing, but it seems to be all ribs and nothing to hit."

The machine gun spurted fire, but no result was manifest. "What I need is a twelve-gauge shotgun," Jerry grumbled in disgust.

“ Say! ” exclaimed Tod, some five minutes later, when any moment they were expecting to come to the fighting front, where they felt certain a warm reception would be waiting them. “ Say, Jerry, wouldn’t it be a glorious joke if that German night-hawk yonder should follow over into French territory, and we should turn on him and take him in camp? If it wasn’t that the colonel said — ”

“ Oh, darn the colonel! He won’t care, if we win out. And if we don’t — well, we probably won’t care whether he cares or not. Let’s get him.”

“ Let’s get across first. Unless I miss my guess there’ll be plenty for us to do in getting past whole. They’ve got guns, those Germans on the fighting front have, that’ll shoot five miles and better straight up. And there’ll be plenty of air-devils waiting to pot us. But if we do come through — ”

They were soon to learn. Out of the blackness below a gun-muzzle opened up in flame and a big shell exploded close enough to send the *Vampire* careening. That seemed to be the signal, for from every angle the bullets and shells

came in a perfect storm. Jerry, between startled gasps, wondered how their queer pursuer was faring—whether its friends below knew it to be a friend. But then, he reasoned, as well as he could with the shells cracking all about, doubtless the other aeroplane showed an identifying signal, which the *Vampire*, alas, did not carry.

Tod had been going higher and higher, ever since the first shell exploded, and now they rode safe enough. Strangely—or not, after all—the other machine had mounted with them. A distance of less than a quarter of a mile separated them. They were directly over the first line trenches now. A few miles more, and then, if they could elude or capture their enemy of the queer pursuit-tactics, safety and the home camp.

The boys were more and more puzzled. What could be their enemy's plan. Finally they concluded that the machine had been detailed merely to prevent their landing with the news of the aeroplane invasion—in time. Let the *Vampire* once try to descend—the German would swing about, quick as a flash, and, hovering

directly over them, drop bombs that would quickly spell destruction. That gave the boys a thought: they could just as well play cat as mouse. They could adopt the same tactics. They would soon see who could go highest.

Up they rose in a giddy climb, the other machine ascending with them. But the *Vampire* climbed the faster. Soon they had a good five hundred feet over their foe. Tod brought the *Vampire* to a shallower slant and maneuvered to bring his plane above the German. The other machine swung out on a wide circle, Tod following closely. Jerry tried a few turns of the crank on the machine gun, with the result that the French below brought their anti-aircraft guns into play and gave them an uncomfortable moment.

It was growing lighter now; dawn could not be far off. For some reason Tod felt that the darkness gave them an advantage. He wanted to come to close quarters as soon as possible. He gave the *Vampire* all the juice she would stand, and gained a hundred yards. Once more Jerry opened fire. It was light enough now so that he could aim with some slight degree

of certainty, and he could gauge the effect of his broadside. He fancied that the enemy staggered a bit, as if some vital spot had been struck, and encouraged greatly, he ground away at the crank. But nothing happened.

“Wait till I give you a better target. I’ll swing off to one side so you can give him a cross-fire,” suggested Tod. “We’re wasting ammunition at this angle.”

But that was easier said than done, for the man below was just as crafty an aeronaut as Tod, and he fairly outmaneuvered the boy. So, for half an hour or more they swung along, jockeying for position, the advantage now with the one, now with the other. Dawn was coming on; broad bands of orange covered the eastern horizon and far aloft a cloud caught the slanting sun rays.

“Now or never,” said Tod. “I’ve still one trick left in the catalogue, and our German friend will have to do some lively thinking to out-guess me there. I’ve been holding it till it got light enough to see. Sit tight in your seat, Jerry, and don’t think I’ve lost my head. It’s dad’s own stunt—the one way to beat

his own invention. He told me so himself. *We're going fishing!* ”

“ I believe you *are* crazy! ”

“ Nothing doing. Under my seat here you'll find a coil of rope. It must be three or four hundred feet long. There's a four-way grappling hook tied to the end of it. Let it down—all but about twenty feet of it. Don't tie the end—we might get tipped over ourselves—but keep a tight hold on it. Might take a snub around that standard, but be ready to let go if you have to. Now I'll try to put you where you can hook it into the tail—the tail, mind you—of the chap below. If you can catch him we've got him at our mercy.”

“ That's easy to say. But you've been trying to get over him this past half hour, and you're no nearer now than you were.”

“ Sure—I know that. But that hook is going to swing around in great shape. It's heavy enough to knock a man over if it ever strikes him, and it'll swing almost straight out when we're going top speed. Ready to let her out? ”

“ I've been paying it out hand over hand ever since you first started jabbering. You can

start your trolling any time you like. It looks like a queer deal to me."

"Huh. Now here's where the trick comes in. Lots of inventor cranks have thought of the fishline end of it, but that's as far as they went. The great stunt is to get the fish to bite on the hook."

"Yeh — without any bait," commented Jerry dryly. "He's a good four lengths away and going like blue blazes."

"Let him. It's all the better, as long as he goes straight ahead. Now we're going to hover over him as a hawk does a pigeon. We're going to coast right down on him. He's below us now, and not far enough ahead to try to scoot out from under us. He'll come too close to the ground before long and he'll have to lift. But we're higher than he is when he starts it. Instead of going all the way down, when we're a rope's length and a half from the ground we'll shoot straight ahead, and we're bound to pass over him. Of course, we're pretty sure to miss him a time or two, but we've got more time than anything else. Hold tight — we're going to slide some."

Power on, Tod began to coast down an imaginary air hill. The other plane ducked at almost the same instant. Like two minds with but a single thought the two machines plunged earthward, the *Vampire* five hundred yards behind and above but gaining every second. The eight thousand feet from which they started dwindled rapidly — seven, six, five, four, three, two, and still there was no lessening of the breath-taking speed.

At a thousand feet the lower machine tried to straighten out on a level course, but the *Vampire* was too close and it ducked again. At five hundred feet the pilot tried once more and again the *Vampire* crowded close.

“He can’t risk much farther,” shouted Tod. “Better pull in fifty feet or so, or he may jerk you out of your seat. Steady now — we’re going to straighten out.”

The man below had evidently anticipated this maneuver, for he too swung up sharply, at the same time shifting off to the left on a sharp arc. But Tod was not to be caught napping and he turned so quickly it looked as if the two machines were bolted together. As they

started upward together a line dropped straight down from the forward edge of the *Vampire* would have dangled a scant twenty feet behind the tail of the under machine.

But now Tod's strategy was evident, for while he was tearing ahead in a straight line, his antagonist was compelled to rise at a slant, his speed materially lessened. As a consequence, within a hundred feet, Tod had made up the gap between them. He was directly overhead, but the line swung far to the rear. Inch by inch the rope crept nearer the tail of the German plane, the hook still midway between the two.

All that was needed now to insure success was for the *Vampire* to hold her own. By the time the plane below had risen to the hook, Tod figured that he would be far enough ahead to take up the swing-back of the line. It worked out with mathematical precision.

The German had risen to within two hundred feet of the *Vampire*, encouraged perhaps by Jerry's failure to use the machine gun, and unaware of the trailing line with its sharp-pronged hook. Perhaps he was figuring on a

trick of his own. Tod expected momentarily that suddenly the other machine would swing sharply and slide out from under, back over the route they had just covered. Perhaps something of that sort was in his mind—but the next second it was too late. Jerry had braced himself for a tug on his line. He was not prepared for the shock that nearly jerked his arm-sockets out. The line burned his hands, hot through his heavy gloves. Hooked!

The line was fast.

“Give him a jerk to let him know what’s happened!” shouted Tod, knowing from the sharp tilt of the machine that the hook was fast.

Jerry tugged—a sharp cry from below told that the pilot realized his plight.

“Surrender!” yelled Jerry. “Surrender or I’ll tip you out.”

“I give up,” came the reply, sharp with fear. “What do you want me to do?”

“Steer for the ground,” shouted Tod. “Easy now and straight ahead. Try any of your quick turns and we’ll spill you. Land in the first open field.”



"Tod! Jerry!" came a cry in a familiar voice as the pilot tottered out of his seat and staggered toward them.

It was light enough now to see near objects dimly, and there would be little danger in attempting a landing. Jerry had his revolver ready to cover their prisoner—they could see now that there was but one in the machine—the minute they should strike solid earth.

A wide field stretched invitingly below; a slight turn, and they headed straight for its grassy surface. A jolt as the strain was released on the rope when the first machine landed; another when the landing wheels of the *Vampire* touched bottom. Jerry sprang out, his revolver ready. Then—

“Tod! Jerry!” came a cry in a familiar voice as the pilot tottered out of his seat and staggered toward them.

CHAPTER XVI

HOW IT ALL HAPPENED

It was Mr. Fulton!

After the first moment of startled realization it was all clear to the boys: the "great fleet" that Vimar had told them about almost with his last gasp — Tod's father was to escape with it. The lone airship they had seen fired upon — they were sure now that it had been fired upon — that was when the Germans had discovered the presence of the fugitive. He had escaped — that was self evident — and got ahead of them. Now, too, it was just as evident why he had not returned their fire: he had made his get-away on an unfinished machine.

He looked unbelievably gaunt and worn, there in the early morning light, but there was a look of determination in his face that ill-treatment, starvation, superhuman cruelty, could not down. He had vowed that the Germans should force from him no part of his secret that they had not already stolen, and bribes, threats, torture,

had not made him alter his purpose. He was a Yankee to the backbone, Mr. Fulton, just such a Yankee as the Germans would soon be dreading as they came "over the top" in irresistible charges.

"And to think," exclaimed Tod, when the first emotion of the unexpected meeting had been spent, "that we went fishing for a German and hooked my dad. Good old dad — did the barbarians pretty near clean you up?"

"Pretty near," answered his father. "Those fellows had the ingenuity of fiends. No wonder Germany's ancient fortresses are filled with torture-devices of the most inhuman imagination. And now, when food is scarce anyway — at sight of a piece of 'dog meat' I'm afraid I'd burst into tears. I pity the poor, misguided German people. Some day the scales will drop from their eyes and they'll turn on their false leaders and tear them limb from limb. I'd like to help," savagely. "Meanwhile, I'm starving to death."

"We'll take you back to camp — as soon as I figure out our bearings. Just now we're pretty well lost."

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“ I think I saw a farmhouse just before you hooked me. It must be off in that direction. Suppose Jerry and I stay here to guard the machines while you go forage for breakfast. Got any money? ”

“ Sure have. I’ll be back as soon as the hens have laid our morning meal.”

He stalked off into the dewy clover and soon was lost to sight behind a clump of bushes. Jerry turned to Mr. Fulton. “ How did it all happen? ” he demanded, with a boy’s love of a story.

Mr. Fulton shook his head. “ It’s too long a story for an empty stomach, Jerry. You wait till we’ve had a bite to eat—and get to where you—you hang out. Camp, did you say? What camp is that? ”

“ Aviation—American air camp. Tod and I—well—we enlisted! ”

Mr. Fulton whistled. “ Of course, I can easily get Tod off—he enlisted without my consent, and he’s under eighteen. But your case is different. Does your father know? ”

“ Told me I could join—that is, he didn’t know we were going in for the Aviation Corps.

But he said I could enlist. I guess I'm in it for good and keeps. Of course, as you say, with Tod it's different."

"Hum." Mr. Fulton looked off into space. "I don't know that I shall do it. I guess my boy can do his bit as well as Tom Ring's youngster can. I'm doing mine—as soon as I can get back. Judging from the way you fellows handled my machine, Uncle Sam needs a few like you two."

After that the talk grew less and less. When Tod returned—it was nearly two hours later—he found them both wearily sleeping off the strain of the night's excitement.

"Fine set of guards, you two are," he greeted them scornfully. "If I happened to be a corporal's squad of goose-steppers, you'd sure be in a fine pickle."

"We're on the other side of 'No Man's Land' and the only danger there is, is from French mosquitoes and chiggers—if they have them over here. What did you rustle for breakfast?"

"Not much. A loaf of bread, a piece of fried pork the size of your hand, three wormy apples.

Then, on the way out, I managed to find a handful of grapes. Not bad, at that, for war diet."

It was a banquet for Mr. Fulton. The two boys forgot their own hunger in the pleasure of watching him eat. One can feast on dry bread after being half starved for a month or so.

The last crumb disappeared; the last grape skin was eaten. "I believe I'll be satisfied to be a passenger for the rest of the trip," suggested Mr. Fulton as he sucked the last taste of pork juice from his thumb. "I feel I've had enough aeroplane piloting to do me the rest of my days. Want to take your dad for a pleasure ride, Tod?"

"Hop right in," cried that youngster happily. "I'll give you your money's worth. The man at the farmhouse gave me the lie of the land. Our camp—" he stole an inquiring look at his father—"lies about a point west of south."

He turned another questioning look at Jerry as much as to say, "Did you tell him?" but Jerry only winked noncommittally.

It was barely twenty miles to home-camp and the trip was made in record time, for Tod was determined to show off for his father's benefit. Mr. Fulton pretended to be highly amazed at his son's ability to handle the big plane, but there could be little genuine astonishment left for one who had made the flight he had before Tod's little scheme had brought him to earth. However, father and son were well pleased with each other, and Jerry was happy in their joy at the reunion. When they had landed at the camp, the colonel made a jovial fourth at their rejoicing, himself as pleased as any of the others.

He had a hearty slap on the back for Tod and Jerry and a cordial shake of the hand for Mr. Fulton, after which he invited them all into his tent, "to talk it over, if you don't mind having an inquisitive old codger listening in," he said.

Mr. Fulton protested that he was more than delighted at the colonel's interest — which indeed he was, for the colonel at his affable best was the most kindly of men, despite a certain gruff manner and an air of unapproachableness toward

strangers. So they followed him in and found camp chairs before the tent flap, while the colonel rummaged among his valuables and finally produced a box of cigars. "My own special brand," he said, extending them to Mr. Fulton with a certain flourish. "Made especially for me—and about a hundred thousand other lucky beggars back in the U. S. A. As mild and fragrant a weed as ever I bit the end off."

Mr. Fulton looked within the box and then at the label. Gravely he extended his left hand—his right held one of the much-praised brown rolls—and as gravely the colonel shook it. "Your judgment is well pronounced, Colonel. In happier days, back in that same U. S. A., I used to go far out of my way to get this particular cigar. In fact," and he smiled significantly at the boys, "in fact, it was going after that particular and special cigar that brought me here."

"And thereby hangs a tale," quoted the colonel. "Out with it, man—but first light up."

Then, with the blue smoke curling lazily to the ridge-pole and from there drooping grace-

fully and eddying out the tent flap, Mr. Fulton told his story. After he finished the recital of the events leading up to the night of his disappearance, he paused a moment and then continued:

“ I intended to go to the lobby and send my message from there, but out in the hallway before my door I caught sight of a coattail just vanishing into the elevator. I had been surrounded by detectives and spies so much of late that the least incident made me suspicious. I decided to find another way down stairs, and made my way down to the first floor, without so much as running into a scrubwoman. There I found I would have to go down to the basement unless I wished to go out through the public entrance. I went down.

“ I was soon out on the street, congratulating myself on having got away without being seen, when at the first corner I found the very man I most wanted to avoid. I pretended not to see him — not to hear him as he spoke to me and began at once to make me a proposition. I tried to shake him off, but he was a big fellow and wouldn't shake. Then I made the fatal

discovery that I had come out without any cigars. Down the next block was a queer old codger who carried this particular brand of cigar, and I went in there.

“The big man followed me. After we were in the shop he ceased his urgings, but instead reached into his pocket and produced a check book from which he tore the first sheet. He pushed it into my hand. It was a check for one million dollars!

“It was a bit theatrical, but I tore the thing into bits. To tell the truth, I would have liked to do the same with the man who handed it to me. Afterwards I wished I had made the attempt.

“I had heard an automobile drive up while we were in there, and stop, but I paid no particular attention. I turned to go out, the big man at my heels. As I stepped out of the doorway, my eyes for the instant unaccustomed to the darkness, something reached out of the shadows and clutched me about the throat, while rough hands laid hold of my legs and the big man behind caught my arms and pinned them helpless behind me. Before I could dislodge

those hands at my throat enough to make outcry, they had dragged me across the walk and out to the curb, where stood a waiting machine. Once I was inside, I was released, but the big man had followed me in and stood ready to lay me out if I attempted escape. So I subsided.

“ We drove along at top speed for hours, through streets that were strange to me, until finally I realized that we were leaving New York behind. I had tried to keep my sense of direction, but before long I was badly muddled. All I could see now was muddy roads and rainswept woods and fields, for we had run into the storm again that had made the city a puddle.

“ Well, all night long we tore madly along, and at the last I fell into a heavy sleep. When I woke up I thought I was still in the machine and racing along, but in a dim sort of way I came to realize that the whirring sound was in my own head. I know now that I had been drugged as I slept, and I was kept in that state of half stupor for weeks—until I had been dragged across the ocean in a submarine— ”

“Then we were right after all,” exclaimed Jerry impulsively. “We had it all doped out just as you have told it.”

Mr. Fulton nodded grimly: “I’m glad you couldn’t dope out what followed after they had me over *there*.” He nodded his head toward the tent-flap, which opened to the east. “All that passed up to that time was a blur of unrelated incidents. I realized vaguely that I was fed, and that after each meal I drifted off into pleasant-dreamed sleep. But at Essen —” He broke off with a shudder, and his listeners, sensing the memories of pain that name called up, waited patiently for him to go on.

“It was a nightmare of a place, with every refinement of cruelty to be visited upon the luckless ones who displeased the mighty. I was starved from the start — starved within sight of a table set with dainty fare — on the other side of a steel grating. Each day I was visited by a great hulk of a man who entered with the words: ‘Are you ready to be sensible?’ and left with a sneer of cold contempt for what he called my pig-headedness. One day they took me outdoors — I ran. After that they kept a

ball and chain on my ankle — the chain a twisted strand of barb-wire!

“ Then they sent me up in one of my own machines, leathered into the pilot’s seat. A few hundred feet up they released me, and left the fate of the machine in my hands. I don’t know what secret they expected to wring from me. I let it dash down to destruction. One of the fiends with me was badly mangled — killed, I hope — though the poor wretch was merely acting under orders. Still, he took an inhuman delight in the spectacle of my agony.

“ After that, for a while, they took off the chain, but kept me in a cell — the same where the grating kept me from the food my famished system craved. One night I forced the bars apart and ate till I could swallow no more. I was sick for a week afterwards, but the pangs were blissful compared to the gnawings of hunger.

“ Then they put me in a cell underground, lighted by one small window, a filthy, loathsome place. In that tiny hole, less than eight feet square, they crowded two insane men with me — the one an old, old man who shouted wild,

incoherent curses all day and writhed in a frenzy of fear all night. The other was a mere boy but with a crafty, incomprehensible mania. For hours he would wheedle and fawn upon me, like a dog, and then in a sudden burst of fury he would try to kill me with his claws. I wonder that I stood that fearful ordeal long.

“Each day they would take me out a short distance, and every time the program was the same. Just at the time when, nauseated with the thought of going back to that den of horrors, I was at my weakest, they would ply me. Would I exchange the terrors of dungeon and torture for riches and honors untold? Would I give up what at best was valueless to my country? No?—then back to the hell there below.

“But desperation breeds cunning. I began to scheme and plan. Finding they could not break down my will they tried other methods. Mind you, all this time I had no idea where I was. I thought I was still in America!

“They took to giving me an hour’s freedom each day, to mingle with the workmen, to watch them fashion the huge aircraft that I had

dreamed out. I knew what their aim was, and its ingenuity fascinated me. Each day I dreaded more and more the return to my cell; each day my hands itched more and more to take hold and direct the making of those mechanical marvels.

“They managed to let me become friendly with one of the most skilled of the craftsmen—a French captive he told me he was. With diabolic cleverness he justified his working there—how it would save his reason, and how little difference it would make in the final outcome. At first I was deluded; he was as clever an actor as ever trod the boards. But one day he overacted and his story did not ring true, pathetic as it was. I led him on though, for during this period their vigilance was greatly relaxed.

“Then one day I found the ‘Maze.’ I called it that after I had tried for half an hour to find my way out. It was merely a big store-room, where thousands of aeroplane parts were stacked in disorderly piles awaiting disposition according to German ideas of orderliness and efficiency. Why it was not assorted in the first

place I never learned. But a man might hide there for hours without detection.

“One day a workman, rather lean of face and dark of eye for a German, handed me a note. At first I thought it merely another trap, but I soon changed my mind. The note was from one I afterwards learned to call Vimar, after I had first learned to call him *friend*. You may have heard rumors of trouble at Essen — all the munition works were affected. There was a general strike. After the military had settled the trouble in their usual fashion, with blood, there were many new faces among the workers. One of them was Vimar.

“We made plans for an escape — after I had learned to trust him. The appointed night I lay hid in the Maze till midnight, waiting for Vimar, who did not come. Next day he told me of secret service agents who were watching his every footstep; he had not dared stir abroad for fear of blasting the whole scheme and sealing both our fates. But he had big news to impart, news that took away the sting of my disappointment. He had got word through to you,” nodding at the colonel. “Help would

be awaiting us at his farm—if we ever got there. And later in the day he came with news still more important to our plans.

“ That night, it was rumored, the thirty planes now ready for service were to be sent out on a bombing expedition. They would not stop at the firing line, some declared, but were going on to Rheims, to Paris itself. That would be our chance, said Vimar. In the confusion my disappearance was not so likely to be noticed. Moreover, and here lay the heart of the scheme, Vimar found that there were thirty-one aeroplanes in the hangars instead of the thirty that were to go. True, the odd one was still unfinished, but all that it lacked of completion was its complement of artillery. And *that* we could easily dispense with.

“ So we made our plan to get off at the same time as did the thirty, to break away from the horde at the first favorable opportunity. It was a good scheme and had just one element of weakness, one that we did not count upon at all. I slipped into the Maze just a few minutes before the time when the guard usually came to lead me back to my hole. So

far as I know I was never missed. All the vast establishment was a-buzz with preparations for the night's events; a poor Yankee was hardly a consequence at such a time, even though that Yankee happened to be the one who was responsible for the whole undertaking.

“Vimar did not come.

“The hour of the rendezvous came and passed. A horrible fear came over me. The secret agents had pounced—a dozen ferocious felines—on one poor terrified mouse. I sweat blood in those moments of waiting.

“Yet there was nothing I could do. Nothing—but escape if I could. I slipped out into the busy crowd, occupied with hurried last-moment precautions. Unobserved I made my way to the unfinished machine. When the signal came for departure I had wheeled my airplane out with the rest, trusting to luck that my aloneness would not be noted.

“Nor was it. I got away clean, keeping well in the rear until at least an hour had passed. I was so far behind that I did not realize the significance of the shooting; I could not see that they were firing at another machine. I thought

that we were already over the fighting front and that the shells were coming from below and were being aimed at the leaders of the flight. I had been aware all along that signals were being exchanged, but I could of course neither understand them nor make any response. Of a sudden I realized that the rest had cleared away from me—had dropped behind for the most part. Before I gathered the meaning of the maneuver I was being fired upon.

“How I escaped I don’t know. It was blind luck on my part, for I simply opened her wide and let the thing career along at her own sweet will. I was scared, that’s all there is to it. But I’m not apologizing; my nerves were plumb shattered.

“Well, I got away from the crowd, in some queer fashion, but it was not long before I saw that one of the bunch was still with me, ahead at first but gradually dropping back—or I was gaining on it, perhaps. I could hardly tell, for I was still in a state of pure funk. Whichever way I turned, after I was able to control my actions again, that devilish machine hung at my heels. You two boys know what happened

after that, until finally I, Richard Fulton, inventor of the pursuing aeroplane, was captured by a method I once sprang on my young, guileless son as a fairy tale to while away a rainy afternoon. Yes, sir, I was caught by a fish hook and line, out of a clear sky. It certainly was inspired insanity on my part to gull Tod with that wild stunt. What it was in him to take it seriously and try it out, and make it work, I leave to you, Colonel."

"I'll reserve judgment till I get the whole yarn from them. But in the meanwhile, you two young scatter-brained geniuses—I take off my hat to you. You, young Fulton, are a true son of a real *man*, and you, Jerry—well, I've got a seventeen-year-old infant at home who's crazy to change a Boy Scout uniform into Uncle Sam's khaki, that I'd like to see square up alongside of you."

"A Boy Scout?" asked Jerry, with quick interest.

"An imitation of the real article," laughed the colonel; "that's what I tell him. When I see a Boy Scout who can get out and *do* things, as you boys have done, I'm ready to take off

my hat, feathers and all, to the organization. Until then — ”

“ Pull in your horns, Colonel,” chuckled Mr. Fulton, “ and off with your hat. Here stand two pretty lively specimens right before you.”

“ You mean to tell me — ”

“ We’re both Boy Scouts,” assented Jerry, jumping to his feet and saluting smartly, “ and proud of it.”

“ And so am I,” answered the colonel with a hearty laugh. “ Here’s my hand, and by George, my hat’s off and sweeping the dust to any institution that turns out two such red-blooded Scouts as you two.”

THE END

